

Defining Success

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[0 : 0 0] well if we could this evening with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read 2nd Timothy chapter 2 2nd Timothy chapter 2 and if we read again in verse 14 and before I go any further are you warm enough? are you too warm?

is it too warm? you're ok? that's good I don't want you melting 2nd Timothy 2 chapter 2nd Timothy 2 at verse 14 where Paul writes remind them of these things and charge them before God not to quarrel about words which does no good but only ruins the hearer do your best to present yourself to God as one approved a worker who has no need to be ashamed rightly handling the word of truth now as office bearers many of you will know that we recently finished studying Rico Tice's brilliant book called Faithful Leaders and I encourage many of you to read it I don't know about the other office bearers but I thoroughly enjoyed reading the book and I enjoyed our monthly discussion it was very beneficial and God willing just to let you know

God willing in November we're going to begin office bearer training with the recently retired New Testament professor John Angus MacLeod he's going to pass on his experience to us but you know I'll never forget the introduction to Rico Tice's book Faithful Leaders because he describes the occasion when an old lady came up to him at a funeral and said to him Rico do you know what failure is?

do you know what failure is? and Rico replied saying well no tell me she said failure has been successful at the things that don't matter failure has been successful at the things that don't matter and you know it's a thought provoking statement failure has been successful at the things that don't actually matter and as Rico Tice sought to unpack that statement he said in his book he said the metric of success and failure is not what your relatives write on your gravestone but what God says about you when you die to some he will say you fool but to others he will say well done good unfaithful servant therefore success says Rico Tice success is hearing the well done from the only lips that matter but failure has been successful at the things that don't really matter and you know what I found fascinating is that Rico Tice he defines success in chapter 1 of his book so if you haven't read it you need to read it but he says in chapter 1 and he bases his whole example of defining success upon Paul his example is Paul in prison as he wrote this letter 2nd Timothy and that's what Paul is talking about here

Paul is defining success he's defining what a successful ministry looks like to Timothy and he does so by describing two types of workers in the church of Jesus Christ he describes first of all an approved worker and then secondly an appalling worker so he describes two types of workers in the church of Jesus Christ an approved worker and an appalling worker so first of all he describes an approved worker an approved worker he says in verse 14 remind them of these things and charge them before God not to quarrel about words which does no good but only ruins the hearers do your best to present yourself to God as one approved a worker who has no need to be ashamed rightly handling the word of truth now as you know this is Paul's final farewell letter to Timothy and as we've discovered it's not only a personal and a pastoral letter to Timothy it's also a precious and in many ways a painful letter to Timothy and yet Paul throughout this letter he has reassured young Timothy that he's earnestly praying for him and he reminds Timothy of his good and godly upbringing in the gospel and that Timothy as he said in chapter 1 he should fan into flame his God-given gift as a pastor and preacher of the gospel because he's not to be ashamed of the ministry or the message of the gospel he's to guard the gospel he's to glory in this gospel message and he's to be strengthened as we saw at the beginning of chapter 2 he's to be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus so that with the devotion of a soldier and the discipline of an athlete and the diligence of a farmer he will remember

[5 : 17] Jesus Christ he will pass on the gospel baton to the next generation why? because this gospel this precious gospel it is the power of God unto salvation to those who believe but as we said in this section Paul is defining success he's defining what a successful ministry looks like to Timothy Paul is defining success but you know from a worldly perspective or a worldly point of view Paul really wasn't the man to give advice to young Timothy on what a successful ministry looked like because by worldly standards the ministry of the great apostle Paul was an absolute failure after all these years of service to the church of Jesus Christ where Paul had expounded and expended all his energy and all his efforts the great apostle Paul you look at him now as he writes this letter he doesn't have a large house doesn't have a fancy car he doesn't have a healthy bank balance he doesn't have a good retirement package and he doesn't even have a family to share it with

Paul had none of these things because as you know Paul has been sent to prison he has been sentenced to death for preaching and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ Paul is now in a dark and damp and dismal dungeon he's on death row he's weeks away from his own death he might even have been executed before this letter even reached Timothy we don't know but what's more is that the church is being overcome by persecution it's been overrun by false teachers in fact a whole section of the church we were told that a section that Paul had founded they'd all turned their back on Paul they'd all given up on him you remember in chapter 1 Paul said all who are in Asia all who are in Asia have turned away from me among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes so looking at Paul according to worldly standards the ministry of the great apostle Paul was an absolute failure but as we said from a biblical perspective from an eternal perspective from God's perspective failure has been successful at the things that don't matter failure has been successful at the things that don't matter because it's not about what your relatives say about you when you die it's all about what God says about you when you die and will he say you fool or will he say to Paul well done good and faithful servant and you know

Rico Tice he made the solemn statement in his book that being a minister or a church member it doesn't insulate us from hearing God's verdict because according to 1 Corinthians 3 the fire of God's judgment will test the quality of all our work of our witness and our worship and it will reveal whether or not as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3 whether or not it's gold silver and precious stones or it is wood hay and stubble Paul is saying to Timothy here Timothy failure has been successful at the things that don't matter because what matters is the well done and the crown what matters is the well done and the crown at the end of the day what matters is being focused and being faithful to what we have been called and commissioned and commanded to do what matters is the well done and the crown and despite what the world may claim and what the world may comment about the apostle Paul

Paul knew Paul knew what God was going to say about him Paul knew what God was going to say and approve his work Paul knew as he says at the end of this letter his final words before he enters eternity I have fought a good fight I have finished the course I have kept the faith there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness Timothy failure has been successful at the things that don't matter therefore he says verse 15 do your best to present yourself to God as one approved a worker who has no need to be ashamed rightly handling the word of truth be an approved worker and you know this verse verse 15 it's the favourite verse of the Scottish pastor and theologian Alistair Begg because as a young boy at the age of only 15 when Alistair Begg moved from Scotland to Yorkshire he was given a bible

I assume it was from his mother but it was a bible and this verse was inscribed on it and it was the words written in the authorised version so if you have an authorised version your version will say study to show thyself approved unto God a workman that needeth not to be ashamed rightly dividing the word of truth and as Alistair Begg says himself there isn't a week or even a day that goes by that I don't think about this verse and the huge privilege and responsibility it is to bring God's word to God's people and that's what Paul is emphasising and explaining to Timothy he's saying Timothy Timothy the ministry of the gospel it's not about seeking the affirmation and the approval of men no the ministry of the gospel is all about seeking the affirmation and the approval of God be an approved worker that's what he says here do your best to present yourself to God as one approved a worker who has no need to be ashamed rightly handling the word of truth

[11 : 31] Timothy he's saying Timothy be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus and with the devotion of a soldier with the discipline of an athlete with the diligence of a farmer do your best that's what he says there in verse 15 do your best be eager be enthusiastic be energetic in your sermon preparation don't be lazy don't be lethargic don't be lackadaisical don't put off don't postpone don't procrastinate in your study no study to present yourself approved to God so that you are not ashamed before God study to present yourself approved by God so that you're not ashamed before God there was a minister Dick Lucas he was a minister in St. Helens Bishopgate in London for many years and he would often emphasise to students for the ministry there would be apprentices in the congregation he would often emphasise the importance of spending time in the study and he would say to his students shine the backside of your trousers off on your study chair make sure you are sitting to study and I mentioned to you before about Professor

Donald MacLeod something he would often say to us as students in the Free Church College he would remind us that the Lord's Day is a high day it's a holy day it's the day in which your congregation gathers to be fed from God's word so Professor MacLeod said feed them prepare your sermons so that your congregation will be nurtured and nourished by Jesus the bread of life and another one Spurgeon the prince of preachers Spurgeon the prince of preachers said in his lectures to his students he said if any man preach as he should preach if any man preach as he should preach his work will take more out of him than any other labour under heaven and you know in many ways that's not an exaggeration because I have to be honest with you I have never known tiredness until I became a minister

I've never known tiredness I was an electrician as many of you know before I entered the ministry and I would work long hours we would work overtime but you know it's a completely different tiredness to manual labour and that's why Solomon in all his wisdom Solomon in all his wisdom in the book of Ecclesiastes he says the sleep of a labouring man is sweet but much study is a weariness of the flesh the sleep of a labouring man is sweet but much study is a weariness of the flesh and you know people they sometimes ask me they sometimes ask the question how long does it take you to prepare a sermon how long does it take you to prepare a sermon that's a good question for you all and while some people think I have the cushiest job in the world and I only work one day a week and that's what I tell most offshore workers I mean they're two on three off

I'm one on six off but I wish that were true but it's not because it usually takes me about 12 to 15 hours 12 to 15 hours to pray plan prepare and preach one sermon which means that three sermons a week you work it out about 45 hours and that's before visiting funerals kirk sessions deacons courts presbytery or committee meetings but you know that's why I love Rico Tice's book that's why I wanted us to study it as office bearers because Rico Tice says never make the mistake of thinking you can prepare for Sunday on Saturday night we must live for the approval of God who sees the hard work that takes place as we sit on our study chair and are on our knees in prayer through the week as much as he sees what we do when we're standing in our pulpit on Sunday and he says we need to do this so that you have nothing to be ashamed of on the day of judgment that's why he says to

Timothy Timothy do your best do your best to present yourself to God as one approved a worker who has no need to be ashamed rightly handling the word of truth and you know that phrase there rightly handling it's the Greek word orthotomonta orthotomonta it's where we get the word orthodoxy from orthotomonta orthodoxy it literally means to cut straight to cut straight it's a word that was often used to describe the way that Roman roads were built because as you know the Roman roads they cut straight through the countryside they brought towns and villages and cities they linked them all together because the roads were being cut straight but it was actually the French reformer John Calvin he explains that this phrase rightly handling or rightly dividing the word of truth this word orthodoxy Calvin said as ministers of the gospel also we are to do for God's people what a father does with a loaf for his small children the father cuts up the loaf into small pieces so that the children can digest it and enjoy it and that's what Paul is saying here to

[17 : 29] Timothy he's saying Timothy your role your responsibility is to be an approved worker by breaking down the bread of God's word you're to break down the bread of life into bite sized chunks so that God's people will be nurtured and nourished by it break down the bread of life do you know after every sermon when I go home and leave here on a Wednesday or a Sunday I never ask Alison how did it go that's always a bad question to ask I never ask Alison was it good because I always think they're rubbish all I ask Alison is did it make any sense did I often ask David that question too did it make any sense that's all I want all I want is that God's word is broken down for you in such a way that it makes sense that's my role that's my responsibility that God's word is to make sense for you that through it you'll be nourished and nurtured in God's word that you will be built up in your faith and so

Paul here is defining success to Timothy by describing two types of workers in the church of Jesus Christ so he describes an approved worker but then secondly and more briefly he describes an appalling worker so an approved worker and then an appalling worker he says in verse 16 he says but avoid irreverent babble for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness and their talk will spread like gangrene among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus who have swerved from the truth saying that the resurrection has already happened they are upsetting the faith of some so in contrast to Timothy who was to be an approved worker in the church of Jesus Christ Paul also describes some appalling workers in the church of Jesus Christ and they were appalling workers because they were teaching false doctrine because instead of rightly handling and rightly dividing the word of truth instead of cutting the word straight instead of breaking down the bread of life for

God's people we're told that they were swerving they were sidestepping the word of God instead of addressing all these difficult subjects in scripture that some people don't want to go near they were avoiding them altogether more than that they were leading the Lord's people we're told into ungodliness because by their poor and their petty example they were speaking with falsehood they were speaking with foolishness they were blaspheming and babbling they were engaging in godless gossip and profane patter and in verse 17 Paul names some of these poster boys that's what we'll call them poster boys for an appalling worker he says among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus now if you remember from his first letter to Timothy Paul mentioned this man Hymenaeus but he mentioned him along with a man called

Alexander he said that Hymenaeus and Alexander made shipwreck of their faith because of what they were saying and now Paul highlights Hymenaeus again but he links him up with this other man Philetus because they were dangerous and deceptive workers in the church of Jesus Christ they were appalling workers he says they were appalling workers you know it was the Greek philosopher Plato he said an empty vessel makes the loudest sound so they that have the least wit are the greatest babblers we would shorten it to the simple saying empty barrels make most noise and that's what these men were empty barrels that make most noise there was this danger and this deception coming out of their mouths they were just empty barrels but they were making plenty of noise within the church of Jesus Christ and they were leading the worshippers of God astray with their words they were leading the worshippers of God astray with their words and that's the thing about preachers words are their work words are my work that's what I work with

I work a preacher works with words a preacher is a worker of words therefore a preacher must watch his words he must ensure that what he's teaching and telling people is the truth of God's word and you can see that that's what Paul is actually getting at here as he describes the herald and he describes the hearer in these verses he says to Timothy he says Timothy charge these appalling workers before God not to quarrel about words which does no good but only ruins the hearer so he's talking about the herald and the hearers tell them he says to avoid irreverent babble because they're swerving from the truth and their talk will spread like gangrene their talk will spread like gangrene it's a very vivid and very visual image and illustration to describe the false teaching in the church like gangrene as you know gangrene is like rotting flesh it's rotting flesh which can spread to other limbs if it's not stopped so if you don't stop gangrene it'll spread to the next limb and to the next limb and take over the whole body and kill the body the only way to treat it to treat gangrene if it's slowed down by antibiotics or stopped by amputation it can only either be slowed down by antibiotics or stopped by amputation and in effect that's what Paul is saying here about these appalling workers he's saying watch them beware of them and he's defining them he's saying about them these appalling workers they define their success based upon the secular standards and the secular suggestions of the world around them they define their success based upon promotion and based upon popularity they define their success based upon names big names big numbers they define their success based upon their history and their heritage they define their success based upon their income and the influence they have on so many people but the thing is says Paul if they're infecting the body of Christ rather than instructing the body of Christ then there comes a time when there is so much godless gangrene that antibiotics are ineffective and amputation is inevitable there comes a time he says when there is so much godless gangrene that antibiotics are ineffective and amputation is inevitable and you know I want to be clear on this you know there comes a time when the only way for healing to take place is to sever and to separate yourself from the infection it happened in the 16th century protestant reformation with the departure of the protestant church from the roman catholic church it happened in the 19th century disruption with the free church departing from the church of scotland and it may need to happen again in the 21st century because you know sometimes sometimes there's so much godless gangrene in the church in scotland today that antibiotics are now ineffective and amputation is inevitable therefore the only way for healing to take place is for some to sever their ties and to separate themselves from the infection that's what

[26 : 06] Paul is saying watch out for the false teachers beware of them avoid them avoid these appalling workers and so here Paul is defining success by describing two types of workers working in the same vineyard working within the same church working in the church of Jesus Christ and he says to Timothy don't be an appalling worker because failure has been successful at the things that don't matter no Timothy be an approved worker be an approved worker do your best to present yourself to God as one approved a worker who has no need to be ashamed rightly handling the word of truth be an approved worker because what matters what really really matters is the affirmation and the approval not of men but of God what matters is that when you close your eyes in this world you receive the well done and the crown that's what really really matters the well done and the crown may the

Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray oh Lord our gracious God we give thanks to thee for thy word thy word that challenges and convicts us in so many different ways but Lord we bless thee and we praise thee for reminding us and reassuring us that we are to rightly handle the word of truth because it is a living word it is as thy word says it is living and active it is sharper than any two-edged sword and Lord we pray that even as preachers we would break down the bread of life that thy people would be built up that we would be built up as a spiritual house holy and acceptable unto thee oh Lord speak to us we pray guide us in our day and generation help us to be faithful help us to be approved workers serving our Lord and Master the Lord Jesus Christ go before us and we pray bless us in our being together and do us good for

Jesus sake Amen we're going to bring our time to a conclusion this evening by singing in Psalm 126 Psalm 126 in the Scottish Psalter page 419 Psalm 126 page 419 a psalm that describes an approved worker someone who sows in tears and in God's timing he reaps in joy and he goes forth mourning mourning but doubtless doubtless that the Lord will bring in the sheaves in his time it's a wonderful psalm when Zion's bondage God turned back as men that dreamed were we then filled with laughter was our mouth our tongue with melody man with melody we'll start to sing we'll start to sing we'll start to sing the whole psalm to God's praise

Zac song Blue Among the heathens said the Lord Great things for them are brought The Lord hath done great things for us When joy to us is brought Streams of water in the south Our bondage Lord recall

Whose soul in tears are we being died Of joy and joy they shall The man who paid in precious seed In going forth doth mourn He's powerless bringing back his sheaves Rejoicing shall return 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 forevermore Amen Amen