

Philippians 2 (Part 3): 19-30 • Two faithful men

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Philippians chapter 2, we're picking it up in verse 19. I'm going to read through the end of the chapter. Go ahead and follow along as I read. It says,

“I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰ For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know Timothy’s proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. ²³ I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see (how it will go or excuse me) how it will go with me, ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

²⁵ I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, ²⁶ for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but (also, excuse me) on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. ²⁹ So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, ³⁰ for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.” (ESV)

Stop there. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as always, we open our hearts to you that we might hear your voice and that you might just open our hearts to understand through your Spirit what you're saying in these verses to us and how we can apply them to our lives.

Lord, we confess to you without your Holy Spirit, it is impossible to read the scriptures and gain anything good. We know, Lord God, it is only through the work of your Spirit, opening our eyes, opening our hearts, allowing us, enabling us to receive your good Word, that it is beneficial to our hearts, our spirits, our souls. Lord, we invite you to teach us today that we might hear your voice, and we ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

Well, in these final verses of Philippians chapter 2, Paul highlights the lives and the ministries of two people, Timothy and Epaphroditus. And so we're here to talk about these two men today. Beginning with Timothy, Paul says, *"¹⁹ I hope in the Lord to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you."*

If, in fact, Paul was in Rome as we believe he was, incarcerated there, we know for certain that Timothy was there with him. And Paul is expressing here that he needs Timothy to stay there until such time as he learns how the thing is going to go for him in terms of his court and so forth. And then he says, I hope to send Timothy to you. In fact, I am hopeful that I too will be able to come along.

Before we start to talk a little bit about the attributes and attitudes that Paul highlights here from Timothy, there's a statement that he makes here that I find very interesting. And that is, *"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy."* That's an interesting phrase, isn't it? I don't know how often I've heard other people say that. Certainly not very often. It sounds kind of strange to our ears, I hope in the Lord Jesus to send. I mean, why didn't Paul just say, I hope to send Timothy to you soon? But he didn't. He added something, I hope in the Lord Jesus to send him. Why did he say that? Here's why.

Because that phrase, *"I hope in the Lord"* Paul uses to communicate to his readers and to us that any plans or timing that he has for Timothy in the work of the ministry is ultimately subject to the Lord's final directives. And so what Paul is doing here is expressing an attitude of submission and an attitude of obedience to the ultimate purpose of God, which you and I don't always know, to be honest.

We don't always know what God's purpose is in a situation. We don't always know what God's will is in a situation. Many times we struggle to figure out those sorts of things.

And so in our language, in our communication, it is best to follow Paul's example and to say, if it be the Lord's will, if this is something God has, if this is in His timing. Rather than being dogmatic about it and making our own plans and saying, this is what we're going to do, we're going to go. We need to reserve the final word for the one who is Lord of our lives. James talks about this same attitude in his letter.

I'll put it up on the screen for you so you can see it. James chapter 4, it says,

James 4:13-16 (NIV)

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, (we are going to) carry on business (we're going to do some business there, we're going to) and make money." (He says, listen,) Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life (anyway)? (He says,) You are a (it's basically like a) mist (a whiff of smoke) that appears for a little while and (it's gone, it) then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.

So, in light of that, he says, you and I ought to say, *"If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."* He says, as it is, when you simply assert your own will, apart from the acknowledgement of God's timing, he says, *"You boast and brag."* In other words, it's a way of simply saying, I'm in charge, I make my plans. And he says, at the root of it, at the fundamental root of it, that sort of attitude and that sort of expression, he says, is evil.

Wow! I mean, that's kind of like, in your face, but then again, that's James. But he's telling you and I a very important aspect of what it means to be under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He's saying that when you have a sense in your life that Jesus is Lord of your life, it's going to come out in your language.

But if you have a sense that you're in charge, you are Lord, you're on the throne, and you make your own plans, that's going to come out in your language, too. Your language tells a lot about what's really going on inside your heart. And that's why Paul says, *"¹⁹ I hope in the Lord to send Timothy."* Because everything is subject to the plans and the timing of the Lord. If God wills, we're going to send Timothy. If not, hey, Jesus is the one who taught us to actually pray this way. Here He is in the Garden of Gethsemane, knowing that the cross is before Him. And what did He pray?

Mark 14:36 (ESV)

"...not what I will, but what you will."

"...not what I will, but what you will."

And that is for you and I. This absolutely beautiful example of what it means to submit our lives to the Lord and, in essence, to say not what I want, but what you want. What you want is most important to me.

Those are hard things to say, because I don't know about you, but I'm pretty self-willed. And when I want something, I want it bad. And I've learned over the years it's usually easier to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission.

I'll go ahead and just kind of bust through the gates and do what I want to do and get what I want to get. When I was sharing this in the first service, Sue was sitting over here smiling because she knows exactly what I'm talking about. When I want something, it's like, wow! It's very, very difficult for me to say, if the Lord wills. Lord, if you want me to do this, if you want me to go there, if you want me to take this job, if you want me to marry this person.

I got a lovely note from a gal who I've corresponded with in the past. She was born and raised in India. She's now an airline flight attendant for an airline in Qatar actually. And she was sharing with me about— there's a young man that she was kind of planning on marrying, but now has had some doubts that have kind of crept in and that sort of thing.

I said yeah, that's okay, better to have them now than later, but I said hey, you got it. You got time. You can pray about this. You can wait on the Lord. You can say, Lord, if it is your will for this to happen, then I pray that you would open the doors. If it's not your will, I pray that you'd close the doors. When's the last time you prayed that prayer when it was a door you really wanted to be open? To really give the Lord permission to close that door. That's hard. I mean, that's some of the hardest stuff you and I'll ever deal with, not as I will, but your will be done. Wow!

And then Paul now goes on and begins to speak about Timothy's heart for the Lord. Look at verse 20 with me in your Bible. It says, *“For I have no one like him (speaking of Timothy), who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare (meaning the welfare of others).”* He says in verse 21, *“For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.”* These are pretty incredible things that Paul is saying about Timothy.

Timothy is first and foremost concerned about the welfare of others, and he is also actively seeking to fulfill the purposes of his Lord and Savior. And so Paul says, I have no one like him, he's an amazing guy. And so we are kind of reminded, yeah, these are rare qualities. Very rare qualities.

Because you see, for you and I, it's just, and I think you'll agree with this, it's so easy to become overwhelmed and engrossed in my affairs, in what's going on in

my life? What's happening to me? And what's happening to me is what's playing on the screen of my life and in my heart and mind. And I don't see what's going on in your life. And that's the vast majority of us. Let's just admit it. We see our own lives, pretty much exclusively.

And yet Paul says of Timothy, now this is a man who is genuinely concerned about what's playing on the screen of other people's lives. He's genuinely concerned about those people. He really wants to be there, to be involved, and to be an encouragement to those people. And yet, you and I are kind of convicted by this whole discussion because we know how obsessed we can become by our own issues.

But here's what we don't often realize. It's what happens in our lives when we become obsessed with all of the drama and all the stuff that's happening to me. Do you remember when Jesus told the parable of the sower?

And He said that a man went out to sow his field, and He's telling obviously a word picture here. And He cast the seed onto various different qualities of soil. You guys remember the parable. Some of it was rock hard, which symbolized the Word hitting a hard heart and some of it was soil that was filled with the seeds of weeds and that sort of thing and some of it fell on soil that was very shallow and there was a rocky, kind of an area but just beneath the soil, and then some of it fell on good soil. (Luke 8:4-8)

We usually think of that parable as describing kind of an evangelistic sort of a—this is what happens when you go and talk to people and tell people about Jesus. You understand here, though, that is, that's a picture also of what happens when a Christian hears the Word of God and has a particular heart condition that is going on in their lives that may be hardness of heart.

You think Christians can't be hard in heart? You think Christians can't be shallow? You think Christians can't also be full of weedy, sort of soil? What did Jesus say? He said, when the seed, the Word of God goes into the soil that is filled with all these seeds that would grow up and otherwise become weeds, He says they end up choking out the plant and restricting its fruitfulness. Right? Keeps it from becoming fruitful. Okay.

What are, what are the weeds? What's that a picture of? What did He say? What did He tell us? He said, the weedy soil is a picture of an individual who hears the Word of God but the worries of this life choke it out. They're so busy, so constantly obsessed, constantly dealing with what's going on in my life again, what's playing on the screen of my life, that the Word of God can't get in to become fruitful because it's being choked out by all these other concerns.

You see, when Paul talks about Timothy as a man who's concerned for others, He's actually talking about a man whose heart is ripe for the Word of God to get in and bear fruit. Because the worries of this life, the worries of his own issues, have taken a back seat to the issues and the concerns of the kingdom of God.

What did Jesus tell us? Seek first the kingdom of God, right? (Matthew 6:33) Make that your first priority. And then all those other things that take up so much of our time and attention and create such drama. Those things will be taken care of along the way. You just get your heart, your eyes, your focus on the things of the Lord.

Put it on the kingdom of God. Be asking the Lord, what do you have for me today? What is your will for me today? What is your direction for me today? Where do you want me to go? Who do you want me to talk to? I know there's things going on in my life, Lord, but I know that if I sit and focus on them, and I focus exclusively on what's happening in my life, I know what's going to happen.

The worries and the cares of this life are going to choke out the Word of God. And I'm not going to be truly fruitful in the kingdom. And I want very much to be fruitful. So, I ask you, Lord, to help me to look past my own issues, to see what's going on in other people's lives, to pray for other people, to be thinking about other people, the concerns that are happening in their lives.

It's interesting when Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, the one he's talking about here, he actually makes a kind of a neat word picture about this very attitude. Let me show you this on the screen.

2 Timothy 2:4

No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs – he wants to please his commanding officer.

He says, “*No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs* (why? because) — *he wants to please his commanding officer.*”

Again, that's a word picture describing an individual who has entered into the military and when they're in the military. Paul says, essentially, they want to be focused on what the military demands of them during that time and not all focused and distracted by affairs that are beyond the scope of their military commitment, right?

Obviously, we're talking about a soldier, that's you and me. When he refers to civilian affairs, he's talking about the affairs of this world, and of course, the

commanding officer is Jesus Christ. And so he's basically saying here, no believer wants to become so obsessed and so fractured by all the affairs of this world that he is no longer able to serve his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

But that's what happens all the time, doesn't it? Believe you me, the enemy knows how to make you ineffective for the kingdom of God, and that is to get you completely self-focused, get you completely turned inward, looking at you, looking at what's happening to you. He knows. Oh, he knows. And he knows what buttons to push to get you there. Believe me, he knows my buttons too, very well.

It's a constant challenge as believers. It's a constant challenge to keep our eyes on Jesus and His will, and His purpose and His kingdom. I love the fact that Timothy was the kind of man who looked to the Lord.

Paul goes on verse 22, look with me there. He says, *“But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.”* You read this statement by the apostle Paul and you kind of wonder, oh, was Timothy his son? No, he wasn't. And what Paul is saying here is not that he's his biological son, but that he's his son in the faith. And Paul had discipled Timothy and brought him up to a place of his service and so forth.

And you'll notice that Paul says here, as the son in the faith, he's proven himself. He's proved himself. And those are pretty incredible words coming from the apostle Paul because following the apostle Paul was no easy thing. Because the kind of stuff he went through was no easy thing.

Let me remind you of kind of some of the stuff that Paul dealt with in his ministry. This is from 2 Corinthians 11.

2 Corinthians 11:24-27 (ESV)

Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods, Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

Paul writes: *“Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods, Once I was stoned (literally guys picked up rocks and threw up at him) Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers,*

danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness (I get tired just reading this list), danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night (how many of you loved to go through sleepless nights?), in hunger and thirst (we take so much for granted running down to the grocery store or getting a bottle of water somewhere, it wasn't available many times, he says) often without food, in cold and exposure."

I mean, doesn't that sound fun? And yet, what does Paul say about Timothy? He's proven himself. In other words, he came along, and he lasted. Good grief, I can't go camping without my travel trailer. I mean, if I don't have my microwave and my shower, I'm a mess. And I think of what these guys had to go through in their service to Jesus Christ, and for the apostle Paul to say to somebody he's proven. He's proven himself. He's stuck with it.

We know of another story. We know that there was a very young man by the name of John Mark who was the nephew of Barnabas who came along with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey and he was scared and he didn't last and he left. They got about halfway into the thing and he was like, I'm going home. This is too much. Now, he was a young man. (Acts 15:36-41)

Later on, we know that he matured, and the Lord used him in some very powerful ways toward the end of his life. Paul makes some very loving statements about John Mark. In fact, he says, he's useful to me in my ministry, much later on. (2 Timothy 4:11)

But about Timothy, he says he has proven himself, and the reason that Paul is saying this to the Philippians is because he wants to highlight for them this kind of, this level of devotion, Timothy is an example. And guys, we need godly examples. We need selfless examples of people, don't we? We need to be able to look.

The writer of Hebrews when you read through that wonderful letter, he talks about people who've been through the worst of circumstances and who stood by faith in the Lord. And you know what he calls them? He calls them a great cloud of witnesses. I love that phrase. We need a cloud of witnesses. (Hebrews 12:1)

I was thinking to myself about the last 150 years in the cloud of witnesses that the Lord has given us. I think of men like George Mueller who went into England and started just picking up orphans, taking care of them in some of the most incredibly challenging circumstances. More recently, I think of men like Billy Graham and just their tireless efforts to get the gospel out to the lost.

I think about women like Corrie Ten Boom who came out of a German prison camp and instead of just licking her wounds for the rest of her life, gave the rest of her life to tramp for the Lord and to go wherever the Lord called her to tell the people that Jesus can be with you in the darkest places of life.

I think of women like Johnny Erickson Tada, who, after being paralyzed from the neck down, devoted the rest of her life and still continues today to tell people how Jesus Christ is Lord, even in the tragedies and the most difficult things that life can present to us. I've had opportunity on a couple of occasions to hear Johnny Erickson Tada speak at various things.

But the point is, these people become for us this wonderful cloud of witnesses of what it means to live for Jesus selflessly, to commit ourselves to His agenda, His purpose, to the kingdom of God, and so forth.

But Timothy isn't the only example given here. Notice in verse 25, Paul says, *"I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need..."*

Wow, again, this is a big thing for the apostle Paul, in light of what we read, he kind of went through, the challenges he went through in his ministry. He calls Epaphroditus, my brother, my fellow soldier, my fellow worker. Epaphroditus was a man who was willing to risk it, to serve the Lord and to give up his own comfort and so forth.

And Paul goes on to speak of, in verse 26, how he wants to send him home now. He says, *"...he has been longing for you all and (he) has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. (And) indeed he was ill, near to death (as a matter of fact). But God had mercy on him, and not only on him, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow."* Meaning I'm already in prison and the difficulties of that are enough, and then to add the death of Epaphroditus, but he says God was, God was merciful.

Word had gotten back to the believers in Philippi that Epaphroditus had become ill, and now he was longing to go home to assure them that he was okay. And Paul says here that he was a man who was willing to risk that sort of a thing.

Look at how he ends this thing, verse 28. He says, *"I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious."* ²⁹ So (he says) *receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor (men or) such men..."*

By the way, that's why we're talking about Timothy and Epaphroditus today. Because Paul says right here, to honor such men, and that's why we're bringing

out their character traits, and their attitudes, and their heart for the Lord, because these men should be honored in our hearing. Because it's an encouragement to you and I to live the same way.

And so he says, look, look what he says in verse 30, speaking of Epaphroditus, he says, “...*for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.*” And that's the heart right there. He was willing to risk his life.

Do you know why he was willing to risk his life? Because it wasn't his life. It didn't belong to him. He'd been purchased. He'd been bought by Jesus Christ on the cross through His blood, and now he belonged to the Lord. And when you understand the implications of what it means to belong to the Lord, you recognize this is not my life. It didn't belong to me, my things. This is not my money. This is not my car. I mean, the Lord gives me stewardship of these things, but they belong to Him because I belong to Him. And He can do with them whatever He wishes. And He can do with me whatever He wishes. It's His life. Right?

You guys remember when John beheld the revelation of the throne of God and he said that he saw these elders around the throne and, and he spoke of the crowns that they wore and how when they worshiped the Lord, they cast their crowns before the Lord. (Revelation 4:10-11) That's a word picture for you and I of taking what God has given us and just laying it down.

God's given us gifts, talents, abilities, resources, a physical body, the breath in our lungs, and He's waiting for you and I to lay it down instead of using it for our own purposes. To give it to Him and to say, Lord, this is, I'm yours.

In fact, isn't that our, isn't that the way we worship him? Didn't Paul say, in light of all this or in view of God's mercy, let us offer ourselves as living sacrifices? Holy, it's holy, it's pleasing to God, offering yourself as a living sacrifice which, he says, is your spiritual act of worship.

We know what our physical act of worship is. Singing, clapping our hands, maybe raising our hands, stand up, sit down, whatever, the Lord might lay upon you to do. That's physical.

What's your spiritual act of worship? Jesus, I'm yours. My life is yours. To offer yourself as a sacrifice means that you're willing to hop up on the altar and to die to self that Christ might live through you. That's why Paul calls it a living sacrifice.

And it's the opposite of what the way the world tells you to live. The world tells you and I to live for me, for my needs, my concerns, my life. Right? God's Word says, live for Him. In fact, as we saw last week, Jesus actually said to us, if you seek to save your life, you'll actually end up losing it. But if you lose your life for my sake, you will find it. (Matthew 10:39)

Let me show you a wonderful passage and we'll get ready to close with this. From 1 John 3:16, John writes this:

1 John 3:16 (ESV)

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

“By this we know love (How?), (that he laid his life) laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”

Wow! That's pretty powerful stuff. I mean, forget about just not being selfish. Here he says, lay down your life. Lay down your life for your brothers and sisters in Christ. Be willing to lay down your life. Am I willing to do that? Are you? Boy, that's something we have to go to the Lord with and ask, don't we? But our lives have been given to us and all that we have has been given to us that we might lay it down and let Him be Lord of it.