

What's Your Name?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 May 2024

Preacher: Fred Buhler

[0 : 00] Well, it's certainly good to be here and have this time of fellowship with you and just trust that the Lord will bless our time together. I've kind of been keeping up with your journey as a church through Charles and Ellie and Brian and have been impressed that you are now part of a conference or a denomination.

Because we've spent years in ministry and my parents ahead of me in ministry and we always found the support and the encouragement and the guidance of being part of a larger group was very helpful.

Because my parents' ministry and my ministry was mostly in smaller communities, smaller churches. And so having this wider body to support and to guide and to encourage was invaluable to us.

And part of the time that I was involved with conference work as well as pastoring was when I was involved with our board of missions. And one of the trends that we noticed, we would see quite often, that's fairly common now, is shorter term mission work.

So people would go out for either a period of weeks or a few months or maybe a year or two and be involved in some kind of mission work. And very often we found that the involvement was just as valuable or perhaps more valuable for the person that went out.

[1 : 27] It was a life-changing experience to go out to live in another culture, to work and serve in another culture. One of the things that we really emphasized when we were going to be sending out a short-term mission worker was that they needed to have the backing of their local congregation.

It was important to us that when someone went out to the mission field, that they had a support team standing behind them. That they had a good relationship with the local church. That they were someone that had already been a witness for Christ in their own community so that they could be effective when they went off into another culture.

And then it was very gratifying if we saw somebody that went out and they really connected well with the people that they went to serve. They won the hearts of the people there and they had an effective ministry.

You know, even that I had my own experience as a young person. Finished Bible college. Having questions about what was next in life. Going off to Nicaragua for six weeks.

And that ended up becoming more mission involvement for several years for my wife and myself later on. And so it was an important step in following God and in growing.

[2 : 50] This morning, I'm going to talk to you about a short-term missionary that we read about in Scripture. Now, we might think that short-term missions is a fairly recent concept, but actually, it's pretty well as old as the church itself.

And so our scripture this morning comes from Philippians chapter 2. And there's just five verses there that talk about a short-term missionary. Philippians chapter 2, verse 25.

Now, the setting is that the Apostle Paul, who's writing this letter to the church in Philippi, is under house arrest in Rome. He follows kind of at the end of his earthly ministry.

He's imprisoned in Rome. And he has established church congregations throughout a large part of the Roman world. And so he has all these connections.

And one of the connections he has is with the church in Philippi. And so the church in Philippi, knowing that Paul is in prison in Rome, sends someone to support him and to help him.

[4 : 00] They send him a care package, a financial care package that expresses that the church is aware of his situation. They are standing with Paul in his ministry in Rome. And because Paul does have a ministry in Rome, he's under house arrest.

But lots of people are coming to him. And he's gotten a special ministry with the soldiers who are guarding him. And so the soldiers that are in Caesar's household are hearing the gospel through Paul's ministry while he's a prisoner.

Anyway, the church in Philippi is aware that he's there. They said, we love this fellow. He helped establish our church here in Philippi. And we're going to send him our love and our support. So from Philippians chapter 2, verse 25, we read, But I think it is necessary to send back to you, Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs.

For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed, he was ill and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him, but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow.

Therefore, I am all the more eager to send him so that when you see him again, you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. Welcome him in the Lord with great joy and honor men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

[5 : 37] So there we have a little glimpse, and this is the only place in Scripture we read about this man, Epaphroditus. But we have a little glimpse of the connection between the church in Philippi, the messenger that they sent to Paul and to Paul in Rome.

Now we find that Epaphroditus was serving. He became ill, almost to the point of death.

He was a person that the church entrusted with this mission. Now it would have taken, since it was about somewhere roughly around 800 miles that Epaphroditus had to travel to get to Rome, where Paul was, it would have taken him maybe a couple of months to get there.

Some of the travel would have been across land, some of it would have been by water, on ships, and it would have been quite an effort. So he would have taken a couple of months, probably, to get there.

Epaphroditus, now someone mentioned to me this morning, they asked, what are you going to be talking about? And I said, short-term missions and Epaphroditus. Sounds like a Greek name. And it is. It is a Greek name.

[6 : 53] And actually, the root of Epaphroditus' name comes from Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, fertility, and beauty. The name Epaphroditus would have been connected to somebody who was beautiful or handsome, somebody who was attractive.

So it wasn't a Jewish name. So the background of Epaphroditus would not have been associated with Judaism, would not have been associated with Christianity.

He would have grown up in a secular setting. He would have grown up in a Greek setting. And the Greeks, according to Scripture, Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians, the Greeks seek wisdom.

They think the cross is foolishness. And they seek wisdom. They think that their culture, their way of thinking is superior to Judaism, to Christianity.

The connection with the goddess Aphrodite means that they would have been very devoted to passion or to secular living, to love.

[8 : 07] And so they would have possibly looked with some disdain at Jews who had this strict moral code or at Christians who had this strict moral code. And they would have thought that these believers were naive.

They were maybe somewhat, well, they believed in the foolishness of God becoming a man and going to a cross and dying. That's not the way that the Greek gods would have operated.

That's not the way the Greek gods would have done anything. And so they kind of looked down on followers of the way of Jesus Christ. So that was a setting that Epaphroditus would have lived in.

But somewhere along the line, he became a follower of Jesus Christ. He became a part of the church in Philippi. And when we read about the start of the church in Philippi in Acts chapter 16, his name doesn't come up.

So we don't really know that part of the story. But we know that years later, he was an active part of that church. And he was trusted by the church so much that they sent him on this mission to support Paul and to bring a gift for him.

[9 : 19] So Paul has described him, we've read already from Philippians chapter 2, how this man is very selfless. He's not self-indulgent. He's not given over to earthly passions, even though his name might say that that's where he comes from.

That's not who he's about. He's a sacrificial and a faithful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. He's willing to suffer. He's willing to even face death in his service to God and to others. And that made me think a little bit about ourselves. What kind of a name do we carry? Perhaps as a person, as you're growing up in a home, you were given a certain kind of a title or a certain kind of a name. I know a lot of us carry something from our past, maybe from school, maybe from a teacher, maybe from a parent, maybe from our buddies in the playground. We carry a certain kind of a name. We identify ourselves in a certain way. Do you carry the name inadequate?

[10 : 38] Do you carry the name victim? Do you carry the name pampered? Do you carry the name jock? Popular?

Self-made? We all come from a background of some kind. We all have some kind of a history, and we carry a certain name. Does your story, does the story of your life have a before name and an after name?

Maybe some of you carried a name of struggle and hurt and heartache and maybe hopelessness, and then you met Jesus Christ, and you were given a new name.

Maybe some of you grew up in a Christian home like I did, and you sort of knew the story of Christ all the way along, but at some point it became a personal story. And you said that one day came that time of surrender where you said, I'm not living for self anymore.

I'm living for the Lord Jesus Christ now, and I have a new name. We sometimes used to sing this song, there's a new name written down in glory, and it's mine. Oh, yes, it's mine.

[11 : 56] I'm redeemed. So what kind of a name does Jesus offer to those who come to him in repentance and faith? What kind of a name does Jesus offer to you when you come to him and say, I am a sinner, I am in need of your saving grace, I receive your mercy, I receive your forgiveness, I receive the gift of eternal life?

What name does he give you? Let's just, I'd like to get some feedback from you. What name do you like about being part of the family of God? Beloved.

You know, that's the first one I put on my list here. What other names come to mind when you think about being a child of God? Forgiven. Righteous.

Righteous. Clothed with the righteousness of Christ, right? Not righteousness that we produce on our own, but given the righteousness of Christ. Privileged.

Blessed. Redeemed. A warrior. There we go. You know, Epaphroditus is referred to as a fellow soldier.

[13 : 07] Strong. Strong. Chosen. Secure. There are so many ways that Scripture describes those who belong to Christ.

So many wonderful names that we have. So we don't have to walk around saying, well, I'm just an Epaphroditus. I am a chosen, loved, forgiven, child of God.

Those are names that God gives us. A citizen of heaven. I am a new creation. So as a saint and a servant of Jesus Christ, trusted by the church, valuable to Paul, Epaphroditus is described in a few different terms here in this passage of Scripture.

He says, Paul writes, I think it is necessary to send back to you, Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier.

I would like to take just a few minutes to look at those different terms. Brother, or we could, it is a generic term.

[14 : 17] It means brothers and sisters. It means belonging to the same family. It talks about fellowship. It talks about belonging.

We've already heard this morning in the opening that Pastor Josh did about being part of the family of God, being welcomed and being here present as part of the family of God.

You know, even years ago, before the advent of the internet, I was attending a conference, and they were already talking about the fact that people, more and more in our society, are choosing to what they called was cocoon.

In other words, people are choosing to live in their own little world. And that was, at that time, it was mostly, they talked more about cable TV and things like that, and the kind of entertainment that you can have just within your own home.

And so you build this nice little fancy home, and particularly you see it in cities, don't you, where they have a little short driveway and a garage door. And the car drives up, the garage door opens,

the car drives in, the garage door closes.

[15 : 30] And that's how everybody lives in their own little cocoon. And they miss out on this whole sense of community. Of course, there are people that find their sense of community, with different involvements, whether it be work, whether it be recreation, whether it be a club of some kind.

But society, so much at large, is living in this sense of isolation. And probably even more so since the internet, and then of course with the whole COVID thing, there is a sense of people being separated so much from each other.

And scripture talks so much about the importance of being connected, of being part of the family. You know what? The other night at our Bible study, we have a little Bible study group that meets in Hanley.

And there were two different opinions expressed that led to a bit of an interesting discussion.

Because we're talking about this term, being a child of God.

And one person spoke up and said, everyone is a child of God. And right away, somebody else spoke up and said, actually, only those who have received the gift of salvation are children of God.

[16 : 48] And so there was a bit of a back and forth discussion about that. Granted, everyone is created by God, everyone is loved by God, but does the Bible really teach that everyone is a child of God?

If you listen to Alan Jackson's country song that says, we're all God's children, why can't we all be one big happy family? I see a Baptist, I see a Jew, I see a Mormon, I see a Muslim, I see a Buddhist, I see a Hindu, and I see you.

And we're all one big happy family. We're all children of God. Is that biblical? biblical? I didn't think so. So then we, in our Bible study, we looked at a few different scripture passages.

And we looked at John 1, verse 12 and 13, that says, yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, nor of a husband's will, but born of God. He gave the right to become children of God.

[17 : 59] And then there was Romans chapter 8, verses 15 to 17. Beautiful verses. Now it's interesting, when I was doing my study, I was using my big reference Bible, now I'm using a different one, so I've got to look on the page to find where the verses are.

Romans 8, 15. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the spirit of sonship.

And by him we cry, Abba, Father. The spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ.

If indeed we share with his sufferings, in order that we may also share in his glory. For he adopted us as sons and daughters of God.

Romans chapter 9, verse 26, says a very similar thing. Quoting the prophet of Hosea, it says, Galatians chapter 3, verse 26 to 29, talks again about being part of this family of God.

[19 : 27] You are all sons, or we could use the generic term, you're all children, of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. So Paul makes a point of saying, Epaphroditus is a brother.

And he describes him as someone who is a beloved brother. Then he goes on to say, he's not only a brother, but he is a fellow worker. Now Paul often uses this term, fellow worker, when he refers to others that are part of the family of God that he has a connection with.

It comes out particularly strongly in 1 Corinthians chapter 3. Now the church in Corinth, again a church that Paul had helped to establish in his ministry, was going through a bit of struggle.

[20 : 36] And in some ways I'm almost a bit glad that the early church had some struggles because that means that Paul wrote letters to help them correct what was wrong. And so then we have that information that not only is it part of human life to have some struggles, but God's word addresses ways to handle those struggles.

And so this part of the struggle that the early church in Corinth was having was that they had some divisions. They had some people that said, well, I follow Paul.

Others said, well, I follow Apollos. And others said, well, I follow Cephas. And then of course there were some that were super spiritual that said, well, I follow Jesus. And Paul writes and he says, what are all these people?

We're all fellow workers, but we're all trying to accomplish the same thing. One person waters, one person seeds, one person tends to the growth, but it's God that makes the growth and God gives the increase.

And then he goes on to say, and there is no other foundation that can be laid than Jesus Christ, but each one of us is a fellow worker that builds on that foundation. So Paul took them right back to the basics and he said, if it's not about Jesus, you're on the wrong track.

[21 : 54] It's not about this person or that person. These people are all important workers for God. They're all fellow workers. We're all co-workers. We're all working together.

We're all building. We're all planting. We're all doing our part. We're all looking after the well-being of the church. We're working together to bring others into the church, but it is God that is ultimately doing all the work.

It's all about him. How effective is an evangelist's work if there's no nurturing that happens after that? How does a church stay healthy and excited if there's no growth?

They all have to be fellow workers. We all have to be working together. But one of the things that happens when you have a group of people working together and I'm sure many of you have had some experience with this is that you don't always see eye to eye.

We spent some years on the mission field and one day I was chatting with a fellow who had come to be a missionary school teacher. He was teaching the missionary children.

[22 : 58] And I knew that there was some conflict with parents about something that had happened in the school. So I went to chat with him a little bit this one day and I said, you know, how are you doing, Jerry?

Well, he says, I didn't sleep last night because this conflict was weighing on me. And I was praying and I was trying to figure out in my mind how can we handle this conflict so that it doesn't become bigger and be a bigger problem and end up being a bad witness.

And I thought, you know, isn't that the way it goes? When there's conflict, what happens? All of our energy, all of our focus gets focused on that and we lose our sense of moving ahead.

That's one of the ways that our unity, our sense of belonging, our sense of being part of the family can be disrupted and can be hurt.

But contrast that with the freedom and the joy that comes when there's harmony, when everybody's working together well and things are healthy in the body. Just think of how freeing that is and how joyful it is and how we feel that we are fellow workers and we are working together for a common good.

[24 : 13] And that's just such a joyful time. And then Paul uses the term not only brother or part of the family of God, not only fellow worker, he also uses the term fellow soldier.

Obviously, that implies that there is a battle going on. There's a struggle going on. I don't have to explain that to you because I'm sure each of you in your everyday life know what it's like to be part of that spiritual battle, that tug between good and evil.

But how does the devil wage his battle against the church? Well, I've already mentioned when he brings conflict or disunity, that creates problems within the church.

Sometimes he causes it by distractions. Remember when Jesus talked about the four soils? He said, you know, some of the seed fell on hard ground and the birds came and devoured and didn't grow and some fell among thorns and the thorns grew up and choked it.

And some fell on the rocky ground. It sprang up quickly, but it didn't have deep roots and so it withered and died. Some fell on good ground. And then the disciples came to Jesus and said, well, what was that little story about?

[25 : 30] What was that parable about? And he explained it to them and he said about the one kind of seed that the thorns had choked out. He said, people receive the word, but the cares of this world and the desire for riches choke out the word.

Satan will try to distract us with so many different ways. We can be busy with a lot of good things and we can end up missing the best things. And so we need to be tuned into God.

So thankful that it was mentioned that today is the anniversary of Pentecost because we wouldn't be able to live this Christian life without the empowering of the Holy Spirit. To recognize when we're

devoting ourselves to not the best things, maybe good things, but not the best things. So Satan can distract us. Satan can distract us by helping us feel content when we're actually being complacent and apathetic. Godly contentment is commendable, but apathy just deadens everything.

Years ago, I remember reading *The Normal Christian Life*, a book written by a Chinese Christian named Wachbun Ni. And he talked about an average Christian life and he talked about the normal Christian life.

[26 : 48] And he said, the average Christian life is when you look around and you see everybody else just kind of doing their life and you're just kind of going along and doing an everyday life. And you think, you know, I'm as good as the next guy.

I'm average. It's good enough. But he says, then you go to scripture and you read a description of what it means to live a life empowered by the Holy Spirit of God, a life that is totally dedicated to God, a life that is yielded and surrendered in every way that you can.

And he says, and that is the normal Christian life, not the average Christian life. He said that we can become complacent. We can be content being apathetic.

And Satan will use us as a tool to just slow us down and make us sluggish and put the church to sleep. And that's one of the ways he attacks us. And as a good soldier, as a fellow soldier of Christ, we have to be aware of that.

That's one of the tactics he uses. And then, of course, we know that Satan, his biggest way of fighting against us as Christians is he attacks the truth.

[28 : 02] One of his first lines in the Garden of Eden to Eve was, did God really say? And he implied, maybe God said those words, but maybe he didn't quite mean it that way.

And that's the way he attacks us, by getting us to believe something that is not true. There's a little line that's, sometimes it's attributed to the Nazi Joseph Goebbels, sometimes it's attributed to Hitler's or to Lenin.

And there's variations of this idea floating around that say, repeat a lie often enough, and it becomes believed as truth. Or another version of it is, repeat a lie big enough and frequently enough, and eventually people come to believe it is true.

Happens over and over and over again, right? We hear these things, we hear these things, and finally we just assume they must be true, because we've heard them so often. And Satan uses this as a way of derailing us in our Christian faith.

A good soldier is trained to notice danger and prepared to defend against it. So Paul describes Epaphroditus as brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier, willing to serve at personal cost, valuable to Paul and to the church in Philippi, because he was not defined by a Greek name, but by a new name, child of God.

[29 : 31] What's your name? What's your name?