

Sent for Jesus

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[0:00] Amen. Well, when Father Caleb decided to take his very well-deserved vacation, first week of vacation, it fell to me to do the sermon.

And since Caleb has been preaching through a series on Paul's epistle to the Philippians, it somehow seemed the right thing to continue that.

But if you noticed, this week's reading from Philippians is a rather prosaic recitation of the Apostle Paul just sending two of his colleagues to the church at Philippi.

Some have wondered, what can you say about that? It seemed as if I sort of drew the short straw in this series. I got a chunk of scripture with little substantive content, but rather just Paul's comments about how he would send his two fellow workers, Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Epaphroditus... I always stumble on that. Yeah. Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus to the church to which he was writing. And when Pat looked at the scripture, she said the same thing, that I got a piece of the epistle about which I can say almost nothing.

[1:21] And it looks that way on first blush. But a funny thing about scripture is, is that it is never devoid of content. And even the seemingly boring parts, such as genealogies, or long recitations in the Old Testament of various rules which don't seem to apply to us today, or even Paul's thoughts on sending his two fellow workers to a church, are filled with meaning and content.

We only need to ask how and why the Holy Spirit inspired that they be included in the Bible for us. And then all sorts of things suddenly start to pop out.

So the first lesson in this morning's reading from Philippians is that there is not a single word or phrase or chapter in the Bible which is without great meaning for those of us for whom it is God's word.

So let's dig into it and see how a passage can speak to us as simple as Paul telling the Philippian church that he hopes to send two of his friends to them.

It begins in chapter 2, verse 19, with these words. I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon so that I too may be cheered by news of you.

[2:50] This very simple verse really contains many of the principles which are in the entire rest of this morning's reading. Let's look at it carefully.

Paul begins by saying, I hope in the Lord Jesus. Now, we all have hopes. Another word for hope is desire.

And who doesn't desire things? In fact, much of our lives are taken up with our desires or our hopes, as Paul here says.

Some of those desires are good and worthy and some not so much so. Some desires are downright sinful if we act on them.

The desire to hurt someone who has hurt you is an example of a not so good desire. If we act on it, such as taking some sort of revenge on the other person, it is a sin.

[3:51] These sorts of desires are not sinful in themselves. But if we cultivate bad desires and turn them over and over in our minds, they become sin for us.

And certainly when we act on them, they are sin. But desires of any sort are simply normal parts of what it means to be human.

But note the motivation of Paul's expressed desire or hope. His desire is in, quote, in the Lord Jesus. If we act from a desire, or I hope, in the Lord Jesus, there is a pretty good likelihood that the object of our desire will be something good and that the resulting action will be good.

So what is the object of Paul's desire here? It is, quote, to send Timothy to you soon so that I too may be cheered by news of you.

Paul's hope is to send a faithful Christian worker to a community of faith which he loves. Later in this passage, in verse 20, he says that his motivation, the reason behind the desire, is to send them someone, quote, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare, end quote.

[5:20] But still back in verse 19, note that Paul himself acknowledges that he will get a benefit from the object of his hope or his desire.

And it goes on, that I too may be cheered by news of you. So what's the message here? The point is, is that there is nothing wrong with doing something so as to derive a personal benefit from what we do.

Nothing wrong with that. But the important ingredient which makes this good rather than merely selfish are two elements that are in these first two verses.

One, from the beginning of verse 19, that it be done in the Lord Jesus. And two, at the end of verse 20, that it be done out of a genuine concern for the welfare of someone else.

Now, anyone, a Christian, an atheist, a Muslim, a Jew, or anyone else, can do something out of a genuine concern for the welfare of somebody else.

[6:32] But from Paul's example in these two verses, that is not enough. It is important not only that our actions and desires be good, but that our underlying motivation be that it be done, quote, in the Lord Jesus.

What's that mean? How do you do that? Well, let me tell you, I'm not very much of an expert at this. But I've discovered that it is only really possible to do that in response to prayer.

We can do all kinds of good deeds. I do good things for people. You all do good things for people. But the deeds which are inspired from our prayer life are the true things that make us more than just creatures with normal human desires and actions.

Paul here relates his hope, quote, to send Timothy to you soon. And as he writes, as he writes in the middle of verse 19, now we know from Paul's two epistles to Timothy that he regarded him like a son.

And here, just a little beyond, in verse 22, Paul recites this when he says, but, you know Timothy's proven worth.

[7:54] He's talking to the Philippians. How as a son with a father he has served me in the gospel. so it probably would have been a little hard for him to part with him.

And keep in mind, the distance from Rome where Paul is in prison to Philippi in northern Greece involved a lot more separation than it does today.

If we want to talk with somebody we care for, we can pick up our cell phone or jump in the car or maybe get onto a plane and we're there with them in some sense almost immediately.

But not so with Paul in the year 61 when this epistle was written. You part with someone then over many miles and you might not see them again.

In fact, the other guy who Paul mentions in Philippians Aphroditus was so sick that he almost died as Paul writes in verse 27.

[9:01] So Paul was really sacrificing to let his dear son wasn't physically his son or biologically go visit them. But he intended to do it because he knew that Timothy is the one who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare as he writes them.

The principle here is for you to sacrifice something of your own desire for someone else for their welfare. But note that Paul himself gets a personal benefit from this particular arrangement.

Back to the end of verse 19. Paul notes that he derives a benefit from parting with Timothy since he says quote, that I too may be cheered by news of you.

He knew that his dear young friend Timothy would write him and give him news of how the Philippian church was doing. The concept which the passage seems to teach us is that when we sacrifice something in the Lord Jesus that's the important part we will ourselves derive a personal benefit from it.

Now, this of course is not the only place in scripture where this principle is articulated. Indeed, the whole of the gospel is really about sacrificing something for God, giving something to another with a resulting benefit to the one who makes the sacrifice.

[10:32] The most obvious example of this is Jesus himself. He sacrificed himself to take away our sin and in doing so he personally was raised from the dead and assumed his place at the Father's right hand in the Trinity of persons of God.

Now, no personal sacrifice which we make will be as great as what Jesus did, nor will our personal benefit be as great. But the principle is clear as here articulated by Paul.

He sacrifices something dear to him out of motivation in Jesus and the Philippian church gets a benefit and then he himself gets a benefit.

Our personal lesson is that we should always be looking out to do things in God's name for someone else. If we do that, the derivative result will benefit not just them but also us. Let's look on the account of the other guy Paul intends to send to Philippi, Epaphroditus. This fellow is mentioned in verses 25 to 28.

[11:49] Verse 25 reads, 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.

Now, look for a second at all of the roles that Paul mentions that Epaphroditus serves in this one verse, verse 25. Paul calls him one, his brother, two, a fellow worker, three, a fellow soldier, four, your messenger, five, a minister to my need.

Now, I don't have time. We can't unpack all of that. That's a whole sermon in itself of what these five roles are. But, note that each is different from one another and serves an important role in Paul's relationship with the Philippian church.

So the question is, how many roles do you serve in the life of another Christian? I like the mix of brother, worker, soldier, and messenger kind of all rolled into one.

These are each different and separate roles which we can have in the body of Christ. How many of them do you have? Or better yet, can you identify even one of them that you do as you relate to other Christians?

[13:18] Or are you just living your life to serve yourself? Just asking. Now, by the way, you should know that when people preach sermons, they're really not pointing their fingers at anybody in the congregation.

They're really talking to themselves. And, I wonder myself the extent to which I have any of these or one or more of these roles in the church.

we know very little about Epaphroditus, this fellow, but we note in verse 26 two interesting characteristics about him.

Look at verse 26. There Paul writes, For he has been longing for you, for you all, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.

Firstly, Epaphroditus had a great desire to be close to and among the people of the church of Philippi. This wasn't just Paul's idea. He wanted to go there.

[14:28] There is a temptation to just blow off the fellowship with others and just do your own thing. This guy didn't share that. He had been, has been longing, was the phrase Paul uses in this epistle, to be with them.

to what extent can that be said about you and your relationship with the church body? Do you have a tendency to skip gathering together with other Christians if you have something better to do?

Not this guy. He greatly desires to be with this church. And then, the next part of that phrase, he, quote, has been distressed because you heard that he was ill, end quote.

Now, look at this incredible lack of concern over himself and his amazing concern over their reaction to his own illness, which, according to verse 27, practically killed him.

This sort of Christian unselfishness in the face of personal hurt reminds me of a friend of mine and what happened to him a lot of years ago.

[15:49] His name is Carl and he had a young son about six years old. And his son was visiting a playmate of his.

And the other boy found and pulled out his dad's handgun and as they were playing together, the other kid shot and killed Carl's son. And I remember going to that wake.

There were a lot of people at that wake. The line was like you can't imagine. And greeting Carl and his wife there when I finally got up to the front in what must have been an absolutely unimaginable grief.

But the most astounding thing was shortly afterward, a couple days after, Carl and his wife went and visited the father and mother of the kid who killed their son accidentally with the dad's handgun.

And he tried to console them and talk to them about the gospel. I guess they were not Christians. Now, I'm not sure that I or many of us could do something like that.

[17:06] But that's the extreme lack of self-concern which Epaphroditus showed in this scripture. He almost died, yet his concern was how the news of his near brushed with death would affect those who heard about his illness.

That and my friend Carl's visit to those parents are extreme examples of the sort of putting the promotion of the gospel ahead of self-interest.

Now, my guess is that you folks are probably a little like me. I am really good at promoting my self-interest.

Not so good at my great concern for another on the count of my devotion to Jesus. Jesus never had that problem and apparently neither did Paul's friend Epaphroditus.

Now, there's a lot more in this passage which on a quick reading talks about Paul just seemingly sending two guys to him. But I think you can get my drift that what first looked like it had nothing in it is absolutely loaded with a message and a content for us.

[18:27] So as you're reading through Philippians and you should be reading through Philippians as Caleb does this series, read this particular passage again carefully and see what it says to you.

But a couple of lessons about what it says. Firstly, there is no part of scripture which is devoid of meaning. With deep lessons for us, every day we have to sit down in prayer and spend some time reading this book.

It's a book of good ideas, but it's far more than that. It's a book of spirit-filled principles which God desires that we learn, digest, and apply to our lives.

But unless you read it, even the seemingly boring passages like today's passage, you will never get to first base in this process. If you don't read, pray over, discern, and seek to apply the scriptures like this and the others, you will be a Christian in name only, but not deep in your heart where God seeks to work in you.

Secondly, look at how much God invests not only in human relationships, but in human interaction motivated by the desire to do it quote, in the Lord Jesus end quote, to use the phrase in verse 19.

[20:00] If you're doing good things with others, do them out of a desire and an underlying motivation to relate to them specifically out of your relationship with Christ.

And finally, as you do something in Christ, put your own interests aside after those of the other. other, I'm sure that now many years after the death of Carl's son, and I talked with Carl not about this, but maybe less than a month ago, that he and his wife are the ones who got the most out of that interaction with the parents of the boy who accidentally shot and killed their young son.

He did what he did out of a Christ-like, unselfish concern for them, even in the midst of his own personal grief.

I'm not suggesting this is an easy sort of thing to do, but I am suggesting that it can only be done in our looking to the model and example of Jesus himself, and with a constant guidance of the Holy Spirit.

These three principles derive from this morning's passage in Philippians are not easy. Reading scripture for meaning, even those parts that seem to say little on first blush, doing things out of a specifically Christian motivation for the concern of others, and being so unselfish in our actions of our faith that we do things even in the face of great personal hurt or injury.

[21:36] They're not easy to do, but then again, you know, most of life is kind of like that. If you want to be really good at something, like playing the violin, or a good athlete, or being good at an occupation which requires a high degree of skill, it takes a lot of practice.

What I do for a living is called the practice of law, and for good reason. You don't master it. You get better with constant and daily practice.

And it's no different with anything else. And it certainly is as much true with things in the Christian life as it is with these sort of secular other things.

It's not just something which we easily get the day after we give our lives to Jesus. Now, there's one other theme here in these passages, in this morning's reading in Philippians, which are not found in any one verse, or even any one part of one verse, but it's inherent in the whole passage.

And I've hinted at it, but it merits being named directly. To be a Christian and to do ministry as Paul does requires direct human contact.

[23:03] You can't do it through Facebook. You can't do it through the first century equivalent of Facebook, which was writing letters to another church from a long ways away.

It requires direct one-on-one contact between people. That's why Paul felt the need to send Timothy and Epaphroditus to the Philippian church.

church. He knew that he needed to help them work through their faith. And he knew that that required not a letter from him, but direct personal contact.

And that's no less true today than it was in Paul's day. Jesus did his work with people through direct personal contact. He sat and he ate with them.

He taught them lessons as he walked the paths of Galilee and the streets of Jerusalem. You and I require this just like they did.

[24 : 06] If we want to take our faith seriously, we must have direct personal contact with the Christians in our circle of faith. This also means we have to have a circle of faith.

faith. So the final question is, how are you doing with direct contact with other Christians? Are you here every single Sunday?

Are you in a regular participant in like a Bible study or a prayer group or a Sunday school group?

Do you take time to linger at the coffee hour and actually engage others about their faith and your faith as opposed to just socialize, which we all like to do, I like to do?

Do you visit others in their homes one-on-one or in coffee shops or dinner or occasions where you don't just socialize but you share your common faith with them and they with you?

[25 : 13] And if not, why not? Or are you more or less just a solo by-yourself Christian with no need to do these things and believing that the Christians around you likewise, they don't have that need either.

Paul's example in today's scripture from the end of chapter 2 of Philippians is really a great wake-up call for you and for me to engage other Christians in the sort of direct personal contact which Paul knew that Timothy and Epaphroditus and the Philippian church and he himself all needed as the overseer and as the bishop over them.

Let us pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.