

# Epaphroditus - An Unsung Hero

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we can turn back together to look at our reading in Philippians chapter 2.! We're particularly focusing on the last part of the chapter, verse 19 down to verse 30.

! We have Timothy, a fellow servant who we hear quite a bit of throughout Paul's writings. He was very close with Timothy, a younger servant in the Lord to what Paul was and very much alongside Paul in the ministry. But we also have this man Epaphroditus mentioned. And it's him that we're kind of focusing on this evening in the sense of one who is only mentioned in this letter and just very briefly mentioned. And he's very much maybe an unsung hero. So that's what we're going to be thinking about this evening. But as you work your way through the letter to the Philippians as a whole, as you're looking at the letter, you can read through it very quickly.

[ 1 : 16 ] It's not a long letter, but it's so worthwhile going back to again and again. It's a beautiful letter inspired by God that Paul writes to the church at Philippi.

There's so much we can learn from it. And as you read through it, you find there's so much richness in the sense of theology that we learn. We're learning all about God and the wonder of God and what Christ has done for us.

But mixed in with that is also what it's like to live as a Christian on a day-to-day experience. And the danger is of saying it like that, you separate the two things.

That we see one part of learning about theology, learning about God. There may be things that are hard to understand, so we maybe leave that for some people. And then we might take other parts that are more practical.

And it can work the other way around as well. But what you find is that the two go together. Both are just as important as each other.

[ 2 : 21 ] We need the theology and we need to live that out in our lives on a day-to-day experience. Professor Donald MacLeod in his book, Behold Your God, he has a great quote in that book where he says, It is impossible to honour God as we ought unless we know him as he is.

And that really reminds us how the two things just go together so perfectly.

We need to know God, we need to know him as he is in order to honour him as we live out our lives. So it's not just a case of looking at the important things as the big theological things we can learn here. And the practical things are less important.

That's not it at all. Because we think of our Christian lives and how we live on a day-to-day basis.

What's more important for us? Is it coming to church on a Sunday?

[ 3 : 32 ] That's more important than the other six days that we live? Or are the other days important that we class the church as maybe less important? It's neither.

It's the two. It's important for us to gather together for worship on the Lord's Day, on a Sunday, to learn more about God, to learn about his word. But the other six days, they're not mundane and unimportant.

That's where we live out all that we've learned. How we live out in a practical way, an experience of the God we're getting to know more. Or the Christ we're coming to serve.

Or how the Spirit works in our midst. How we call upon him in prayer to help us. It all goes together. And this morning we were thinking about having a king over us.

In 1 Samuel chapter 8, we were looking at the desire of the people there. When Samuel was getting old, people came with this request. Give us a king over us like all the other nations.

[ 4 : 33 ] We're asking, well, who is to be our king? And is the Lord Jesus our king? Well, this evening we're sort of following up on that. How do we live then with Jesus as our king?

And what we see here is examples of how people live with Jesus as their king. The example of Paul. Paul who had that amazing conversion.

The conversion that so many people look for in their own experience, but so few get. So you have Paul that is often raised up. And we maybe strive to long for something like that.

But you have Timothy, who was brought up by a loving mother and a grandmother, who cared for him and nurtured him quite gently, but helped him to grow up in the knowledge of God.

And then you have Epaphroditus here. Someone who's just almost in the background, who knows very little about. And you see here there's a variety of different people.

[ 5 : 35 ] But they are all living to serve their king. They are all a people who have come to know the Lord Jesus in a very personal way.

And living for him with all their different gifts and their talents. Paul was no maverick. He was no individual. He just went out and did things by himself in his own way.

He always had people around him who helped him. And together they worked for the glory of God.

And as you read through Paul's letters, as you read through them, you find he crossed paths with so many different people.

So many different individuals. And so many of them were a great blessing to his life and to his ministry. And what you find is in nearly all his letters, he ends with a personal note of thanksgiving for those who have been so helpful to him in the ministry.

In the last chapter of the book of Romans, for example, chapter 16, almost a whole chapter is taken up to naming individuals who have been with them and who have helped them.

[ 6 : 49 ] Men and women along the way. And there's at least 35 people named in that chapter who have been precious to him.

And I think of a recent AGM just over a week ago. And an AGM in a congregation is a time when we often think of all the different work that goes on in the congregation.

And the pity is that we don't have the AGM with this number of people. Because there's so many people who need to hear a word of thanksgiving for all that is going on in the congregation.

And so as we're thinking this evening of Epaphroditus, an unsung hero, it's not with a view to a plea for service to the church.

It's not that at all, and I hope it doesn't come across like that, asking for more. It's with a sense of thanksgiving that together we are serving our Lord and our King.

[ 7 : 52 ] That here in our own congregation we have many who are like Epaphroditus, who we maybe hear very little of, but who we can encourage because they are encouragers in all that is done in the name of the Lord here.

Young and old alike, men, women, boys, girls, so many people even here this evening who are involved, are tuning in online tonight, who are involved in the work of the congregation in so many different ways.

And it all comes from having that servant mentality, a servant outlook on everything. And that's what Epaphroditus had.

It's what Paul and Timothy had too. But we're reflecting more on Epaphroditus this evening. He very much had, first of all, as we see, a servant's heart.

He had a servant's heart. And from the little we learn of him here, you can see that. When we are called by Christ, when we come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, it's just the beginning of a life being lived for him.

[ 9 : 06 ] And we need to grow in our knowledge of him, to see Jesus Christ, to love him more, to know him more, to serve him more. And it begins by seeing him as he was, in all that he did for us.

And you think, as we mentioned this morning, Jesus came into this world. He was a king. But he didn't come to be served.

As the Gospel of Mark says, he didn't come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. That was the way our king came, to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

So the more we know Jesus in that way, the more that we see what he has done for us, the more that we see his grace and his love towards us as sinners, the more that we understand of all of these things, the more we see what a privilege it is to serve our king.

That we are no longer serving the things of this world, that we are no longer serving in the darkness of this world, but that we are serving with a servant heart that the Lord Jesus Christ has given to us.

[ 10 : 28 ] That's what we see with Paul and Timothy and Epaphroditus and so many others that Paul mentions as he is giving thanks for those who helped in his ministry.

We are to cultivate this heart of a servant and to grow in Christ. When we are young, we are often encouraged to have good role models.

And I'm sure there's many of the young people here this evening, you're being encouraged maybe to look up to somebody else, maybe someone in the family or someone in the community and saying, there's a good example to follow.

There's someone you can look at and see how they're living their lives and you follow that example. You come alongside these people and learn from them. And it's so good when in a congregation of God's people, these kinds of things happen naturally.

When we see our young people coming in and the older people, we can just come alongside in a natural way and encourage. Ask them questions.

[ 11 : 36 ] Ask how their wake has gone. And that the young people can ask about their experience. How long have you been a Christian? What's it like being a Christian? We learn from one another.

It comes from that kind of servant heart. We were learning by examples. And Paul was very much an example to Timothy, as he was to Epaphroditus.

But they learned from each other as well. It was a two-way interaction. They all had this servant heart where they recognized they were in this together.

Because their greatest example was the Lord Jesus Christ. And you see that in the beginning of chapter 2 where Paul is speaking about Christ's example of humility.

humility. To think on all the things that Jesus has done for us. To think of how he humbled himself. And that's the basis of our servant heart as well.

[ 12 : 43 ] The foundation of ourselves growing together, young and old alike. You see it with Paul how he has developed over the years.

You see it here even in chapter 2 verse 19 where he says, I hope to send Timothy to you soon. Well that's not what he says, is it?

He says, I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon. You see, he's learning. And then he says in verse 24, 24, and I trust that shortly I myself will come also.

No, he says, I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also. So he's adding these little things. He's showing his focus is on the Lord Jesus in doing his will.

And that's the servant heart that he has. That's the way that he is living. And that's the example that he's giving to Epaphroditus and to Timothy as well.

[ 13 : 49 ] And they are learning this together. Look at the way he describes Epaphroditus in verse 25. I thought it necessary to send to you, Epaphroditus, my brother and my fellow worker and fellow soldier.

Three different ways he describes him. My brother, my fellow worker, and my fellow soldier. And so he's showing us here the kind of servant heart that Epaphroditus had.

He was a brother in the Lord. What a wonderful privilege it is for us to have brothers and sisters in the Lord. To have those who are alongside us in this work encouraging each other, praying for each other, looking out for each other.

what a wonderful privilege it is. So we have brothers and sisters. We have fellow workers. We have those who are working with that same heart, that same mind.

It is to serve Christ as our king. And we are fellow soldiers. We are in this battle, because it is a battle at times.

[ 15 : 07 ] We are battling against the powers of this world, but we are not doing it alone. We are doing it together. And so we can look around this evening and see we are brothers and sisters in Christ.

We are fellow workers in the gospel. We are fellow soldiers in this battle. We need to be united in all of these things.

John Wesley once learned a very harsh lesson in terms of judging others. There was this man who had been converted.

But ever since he had been converted, John Wesley had kind of looked down on him. He had seen him as someone who he thought was greedy, who wasn't generous with what he had.

And one day when they were having a collection for a special cause, John Wesley saw this man put so little into the collection that he openly criticized him.

[16:11] In front of others he criticized him for the little that he put in. It was challenging him, rebuking him. But after that the man went to John Wesley privately and spoke to him.

And this suddenly opened John Wesley's eyes. Because what the man said to him was that for the last number of months he'd been living off only parsnips and water.

That's all he was living off. And he wasn't buying himself anything. And he explained it in this way before his conversion he had found himself in debt to so many different people.

And because he had no thought, nothing was convicting his conscience, he didn't think anything of being in debt to these people and he wasn't paying it back. But he said, when he became a Christian, Christ made me an honest man.

And he recognized that he had to pay back all of his debts. So every spare penny he said, after my tithe I have so little left, I pay my debts.

[17:24] And all of a sudden John Wesley realized this heart, the man's heart was for the Lord. In recognizing what he owed to others. And how he was living his life honoring the Lord.

Doing it quietly, hidden in many ways, and yet criticized by others. But John Wesley apologized to the man. And we can't judge those around us.

We don't know what's going on in people's lives. But we should be thankful that we see the servant heart that there is in so many. In so many years, together here, just like Epaphroditus is with Paul and Timothy, all having that servant heart, fellow brothers, fellow servants, fellow soldiers in the Lord.

We have much to be thankful for in that sense. So we have the servant's heart. The second thing we see here is the servant's burden.

burden. We see the servant's burden. Why was Paul feeling it so necessary to send Epaphroditus back? Well, when we read on in verse 25, well, he was a fellow worker and a fellow soldier, your messenger and minister to my need.

[18:48] They had sent him. But it says in verse 26, he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.

And you see here the burden that Epaphroditus had. His burden was towards his people. It wasn't about himself.

It wasn't looking very selfishly at himself. He was distressed because of others. And what we find is the servant's burden, as we believe in the Lord Jesus, there is a burden that grows in us.

When we think of fellow workers and fellow soldiers, as Paul has described there, it reminds us that we are always learning in this life.

That through all our different experiences, we are learning. Soldiers go through boot camp. They go through training so that they can endure hardships when they go into the battlefield.

[19:56] It's something they have to go through. And that's what Paul is saying here as well. When he speaks of it in verse 22, he speaks of Timothy, but you know, Timothy's proven worth.

That proven worth means approved by testing. He has gone through his own trials. And you see it here with Epaphroditus. He has been ill.

Indeed, it says in verse 27, indeed, he was ill near to death. He has gone through this trial, this experience. experience.

But what has it taught him? It's taught him to focus on others. And how many experiences have you gone through without understanding at the time, what is it about?

Why is this happening? But then later on, you're able to help others who go through that very similar experience themselves. And that's what being fellow Christians together does.

[21:03] That's what a community of believers does. How quietly and how subtly things go on in the background. How many unsung heroes are here who will just go and visit someone because they've had a similar experience, whether it's grief or illness or whatever experience people are going through.

They can come alongside. and be brothers and sisters alongside each other because they can say, I know what you're going through.

I have been there. And that we are growing together in that way. And here we see Epaphroditus. He was distressed, it says, because you heard that he was ill.

And it's interesting that that word distressed is only used here and when Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane. The same word there is used distressed as it is in Matthew 26 verse 37 and 38 where he says Jesus was sorrowful and troubled.

Troubled is that same word distressed. And what is that word meaning? Well it's meaning that there is a distress a trouble feeling troubled because of the burden for others.

[ 22 : 23 ] The burden of the Lord Jesus as he was in Gethsemane was as he was saying to his father not my will but yours be done. What was the burden?

It was the burden of the salvation of the world. The redemption of his people by going to the cross. What a powerful way he was troubled.

And it's saying here of Epaphroditus he was distressed because you heard he was ill. It doesn't seem to compare but it still says that there is a burden towards the people.

A genuine concern. His focus, his concern was on others. And it's a wonderful privilege when we have people with that kind of mindset as well.

One commentator was speaking about this in a situation where the church didn't have this kind of nature, didn't have this kind of attitude. And he said this, what a lesson for the church.

[ 23 : 25 ] How many of us can see no further than the end of our own noses? We are so caught up in what is happening to us that we are unable to see the needs of those around us.

That's not how the church should be. It's not just looking to ourselves. It's not just thinking about ourselves but it's a burden for others.

And the blessing that we have here is that there is that collective burden for others in our midst, of looking out for, of sharing with one another.

And in many ways that is a sign of maturing in our faith and in our understanding. It's a sign of maturing in our knowledge of God and his cause, of what Christ has done for us.

When you see it here in the beginning of chapter 2, maybe especially verse 4, let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others.

[ 24 : 32 ] And then it goes on to speak of have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus who thought he was, who though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but made himself nothing taking the form of a servant.

There is our example of humility of being concerned for others. It comes from knowing Christ knowing our King more and more and so do we have that servant's burden?

we do but let's keep cultivating that burden so it doesn't just stay within these walls but it goes out beyond these walls.

It reaches out to our community all around us to those who are burdened and troubled in so many different ways around us that we would have that burden for them.

And you notice Epaphroditus how he's mentioned towards the end here because of the burden that he had for others. Look at how others looked to him.

[ 25 : 47 ] In verse 28 and 29 what does it say? I am more eager to send him therefore that you may rejoice at seeing him again and that I may be less anxious.

So receive him in the Lord with all joy and honour such men. He sees here that here is one who is a great example of humility.

A great example of what a servant and a brother in the Lord looks like. And there is such encouragement in him coming back that he would be well received because he had that burden for his people.

And if we have that burden for one another what does it do? it means that we are encouraged when we are in each other's company. It means we are encouraged when we are together in the things of the Lord.

Whatever service we are given, whatever little things we might be doing for the Lord here. There is so much that goes on with our young people, with our old people, with the doors being opened throughout the week for different people to come and go and everyone is playing their part.

[ 27 : 01 ] Everyone has something to do and that we are in that sense of being together in it, we are having that joy and that being together in it, we are encouraging one another.

And so let us keep doing so. The unsung heroes, they don't want to be to the fore, but we just get on with it because of our love for Christ and our love for one another.

So we have that servant's burden that we see in Epaphroditus and Timothy and Paul as well. The final thing we want to see here is the servant's honour.

Why do they do what they do? Why does Paul travel around so many different places? Why does Timothy seek to learn from him? Why is Epaphroditus just quietly going about his business?

it's for the glory of God. We don't do it for honour, but we know too that the Lord will honour those who honour him.

[ 28 : 11 ] It says that in 1 Samuel chapter 2 verse 30, those who honour me I will honour. And it tells us in 2 Timothy 4 verse 8 he reward every faithful servant with a crown of righteousness.

righteousness. We're not doing it for these things, but we are encouraged to know that we are doing it for the Lord and at the end of the day it will all be worth it.

Any hardship we suffer now serving Christ, any challenges we come up against, any disappointments that come our way, we can keep on.

We keep on going because the Lord is with us. The Lord is on our side. And whatever we do for the Lord it will be worth it in the end because the Lord is able to bless.

Paul here he kind of honours Epaphroditus at the end of verse 29 when he says of him honour such men.

[ 29 : 22 ] give them their place, give them their encouragement and every one of you be encouraged this evening as you go on doing for the Lord, praying to the Lord, serving the Lord, encouraging in the name of the Lord, be encouraged yourselves and encourage one another.

we don't do it out of selfishness or empty conceit but going back to the beginning of this chapter do nothing at a rivalry or conceit but in humility do all things looking to the Lord Jesus.

He is king and if he is our king we are to serve him and if we are serving him we can be thankful that we seek to do that together with that same servant heart together with that same servant burden together looking to that same servant honour together rejoice give thanks for all that's going on in the name of the Lord learn more of him know him as he is so that we can honour him with all that we are let us pray Lord our gracious God we pray that you will unite our hearts in that way of being servants fellow servants for you fellow workers fellow soldiers in this work of the gospel that we are involved in we thank you for all the blessings that you give to us we thank you for every example that we have from your word but also the examples and encouragers we have around us day by day and we pray

Lord that together we will know your hand of blessing upon us that we would know your strength with us in all that we seek to do and that we would see the blessing of the Lord in our midst that we would see the name of Jesus lifted high and praised near and far as we ask all in his precious name Amen We're going to conclude by singing to God's praise again in Psalm 30 in the Sing Psalms Psalm 30 in the Sing Psalms page 35 we'll sing from verse 9 down to the end what gain will my destruction bring if I descend to death will thus proclaim your faithfulness or praise you with its breath hear as I cry O Lord my God and listen to my plea come to my aid and my distress have mercy Lord on me we'll sing from verse 9 down to the end of the Psalm to God's praise! to God God him will hide his passion bring If I descend to death will trust you your faithfulness or praise you with his bread.

[ 33 : 11 ] Hear us, I cry, O Lord my God, and listen to my plea.

Come to my end in my distress, have mercy, Lord, on me.

Turn my willy into dance, no longer was I sad.

My sad cloth, God, you gave me those of joy, and I was glad.

Therefore my heart will sing to you, and never cease to praise.

[ 34 : 33 ] To you it may, O Lord my God, I will lift and always sing.

After the benediction, I'll go to the door to my right. We'll close with the benediction. Now may grace, mercy, and peace from God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest upon and abide with you all, now and forevermore.

Amen. Thank you, Father, Thank you.