

Two Outstanding Christians

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Date: 21 November 2021

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

- [0 : 0 0] There is a youth fellowship this evening that's at 7.45 in the Upper Hall and our elder Murdo A. Murray is going to be speaking at that on creation care.
- So that's for all the young folks at 7.45. You can see on Tuesday there's a meeting for the WFM, a Zoom meeting, that's at 8pm. And if you wish to be involved with that, please just phone Donna, the number is actually there.
- The contact details are there. It's in support of safe families. WFM are supporting safe families this year as one of their projects. And so for this meeting there will be a safe families worker and a volunteer and also a mother who has been helped by safe families actually speaking on Zoom.
- So I commend that to you. Wednesday has been designated a national day of prayer and thanksgiving by the last General Assembly. So in keeping with that, there will be an early morning prayer meeting at 7.30.
- That will be in the seminary led by one of the elders. If you want to have contact for Zoom, please just contact Lizzie. At 1pm there's a ladies Zoom meeting as well. And then in the evening we're having a Thanksgiving service in English.
- [1 : 0 9] That will be in the seminary and also on Zoom. And I expect to be leading that service. That's at 7.30 in the evening in the seminary. We're living in days when, I don't need to tell you, but we're living in days when prayer is very much a requirement of God's people.
- We're living in times that call for prayer. And it's our great privilege to come before the Lord at a time of designated prayer like this, apart from the usual times of prayer. So if you can at all, please join any or all of these meetings on Wednesday when we hope to cry out to the Lord in prayer for his blessing.
- Now there'll be a special collection taken on the day of prayer. That will be for the Ilan Shear Food Bank. We're told, as you can see in the notice there, that particularly since the lockdown and the follow on from that, that the number of families known to be living in poverty in the Western Isles has increased substantially.
- And they are very much dependent on the food bank. And we're pleased to be able to contribute to that. So the collections on Wednesday will go towards that.
- And also there'll be an opportunity to add further to that collection next Lord's Day. When at the services, at the close of each of the services next Lord's Day, you can contribute to that as a retiring collection as well.
- [2 : 3 4] You can see also that the Christian Institute have set this week as a week of prayer. And that's coinciding with our own church day of prayer on Wednesday.
- And they're very helpfully there, as you can see, set out a point for each day of the week, a topic for each day of the week. Matters which are of particular concern to us in our nation at the moment, to Christians, these aspects of our society call out for us to pray to the Lord with respect to those.
- And so you can read through that yourselves and just pray as you see accordingly. These then are the intimations for tonight. We're going to now begin our worship. And first of all, we're singing from Psalm 69.

Psalm 69, that's in the Scottish Psalter on page 308. And we're singing verses 36. Sorry, 30 to 36.

The name of God I with a song most cheerfully will praise. And I in giving thanks to him, his name shall highly raise. This to the Lord a sacrifice more gracious shall prove than bullock, ox, or any beast that hath both horn and hoof.

[3 : 50] When this the humble men shall see, it joy to them shall give. Oh, all ye that do seek the Lord, your hearts shall ever live. Verses 32, 36 in Psalm 69 to God's praise.

The name of God I with a song most cheerfully will praise.

And I in giving thanks to him, his name shall highly raise.

This to the Lord a sacrifice more gracious shall prove than bullock, ox, or any beast that hath.

Both horn and hoof. When this the humble men shall see, it joy to them shall give.

[5 : 36] All ye that do seek the Lord, your hearts shall ever live.

For God the poor, your heart shall give. For God the poor, your heart shall give. And will not his prisoners condemn.

Let him let him under and cease him praise.

And all that moon in heaven. For God will Judah's cities build.

And he will Zion save. That they may dwell therein and it in sure possession have.

[7 : 06] And they that are his servant's seed. Inherit shall the same.

So shall they have their dwelling there. That love his blessed name.

Now we're going to read from God's word as we find that in Paul's letter to the Colossians. And chapter 4.

Paul's letter to the Colossians chapter 4. We'll read through from the beginning. 1 son.

conduct yourselves wisely towards outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

[8 : 44] Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts.

And with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here. Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, greets you, and Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you have received instructions.

If he comes to you, welcome him. And Jesus, who is called Justice, these are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. Luke, the beloved physician, greets you, as does Demas.

[9 : 58] Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea and to Nympha and the church in her house. And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans, and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.

And say to Archippus, see that you fulfill the ministry you have received in the Lord. I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.

Remember my chains. Grace be with you. And once again we pray that God will follow with this blessing a reading of his word.

Let's now engage in prayer. Let's call upon the Lord in prayer. Amen. Our gracious and blessed Lord, we count it once again our privilege to come together to worship you, to gather around your word and to hear your word spoken and set in our midst.

We thank you for the passage that we read, which reminds us of the importance of caring for one another and thinking of one another even in different parts of your church.

[11 : 12] And so we do pray tonight not only for ourselves, O Lord, but for all of your people wherever they are throughout the world. We know that we have an affinity with them. We know that as we gather here, others have gathered before now and will gather later in this day in different parts of the world to worship the same God as we worship here.

And we thank you, Lord, that you bind us together, not only in a common interest in praying for each other, but also a common sharing in the things of your salvation. And we thank you for your word that brings us so much of importance in that regard of the fellowship that your people have with each other, of the way that they share an interest in Christ, an interest in the legacy that he has purchased at great cost for his people.

O Lord, bless us, we pray tonight. As we come before you, we seek once again that your spirit will conduct us into your truth. O Lord, however much we already know of your truth and whatever experiences we may already have had of your blessing, we pray anew tonight for that blessing again.

We know that we need your hand upon us each day, that we cannot move from hour to hour without your upholding, that we cannot carry out any engagements except in your strength, if they are to be of any benefit to ourselves or others.

And we pray especially, Lord, with regard to our worship, that you would conduct our minds and give us insight. Help us by your spirit, Lord, to engage in those aspects of worship that are so familiar to us.

[12 : 54] And yet, Lord, grant that we may move at all times beyond our familiarity, that we may reckon with the need, O Lord, that your spirit should enlighten us anew in the knowledge of Christ, that we be led once more into a living fellowship with him for these moments that we are together.

And we pray as we turn to your word, O Lord, shortly, that you would bless it to us for our circumstances in this world. We do give thanks that you have taken account of all of these in the writing of your word, as you led people to write it down through the ages of the world.

And we bless you that even in the references to the furthest back incidents in history, in the life and in the experience of your people, that they are relevant to you for us and for our own age.

We pray, Lord, that we may at all times remember the unity of your word, that it is a word, that it is from beginning to end, the word of the living God to us.

And enable us then, we pray, to prize each and every part of it, whatever it has to say to us. Lord, help us to listen. Help us to learn keenly and help us to pass it on to those that we live with, to those that are around us, to the upcoming generation.

[14 : 14] And we ask, as we, Lord, come to this week, which emphasizes prayer, we pray that you would enable us to pray. We pray that the privilege of calling upon your name will be something that we meaningfully enter into, for ourselves individually, as a congregation, as a denomination, and even as we find also the Christian Institute, O Lord, to give us these matters of concern for each day of this week.

We thank you for this, and for the way in which our minds are primed through such as the Christian Institute, who will live daily with the challenges that are set out for the gospel and for the Christian life in our society.

We pray for them, O Lord, and for all who work for them, and for all who seek to uphold the work that the Christian Institute does. And we thank you for the many pointers they give us, to matters that are of importance and relevance and concern to us as a people.

And we pray, Lord, for our nation, for this is why we come together to pray, not only for ourselves and for your church throughout the world, but also the nation that we belong to.

O Lord, a nation that we know has so sadly departed from your ways, even though we know that there are those amongst the people of this nation who uphold your cause, as we seek to do here.

[15 : 42] Yet, Lord, we lament the fact that so many of the multitudes of this nation, as of the world in general, do not follow the ways of the Lord, and indeed in some ways despise your ways.

Lord, we pray that you would grant your blessing, so that your word will come like the dew, and drench us, Lord, from on high, with the power of your truth, so that our lives may be caught up in those precious things, and that as a people we may turn again to the Lord, and hear your voice speaking to us, and respond in repentance and in trust in your name.

O Lord, remember, we pray, your church in its entirety throughout the world, and Lord, also we are concerned when your church turns to the things of the world, and methods of the world, the practices of the world, and we ask that in this day you would, Lord, grant to us, in these days to come, and in the generation we belong to, as we go on in this life, Lord, we pray that you would turn us to yourself, help us to examine ourselves also, O Lord, for we know that we cannot simply complain of the way that aspects of elements of your church have turned aside to worldly things, Lord, help us, we pray, to examine our own hearts, even as the psalmist long ago did, who sought to search and try his own heart, and sought that you would help him to do this, and to show him if there be any way in which he needed your forgiveness and your guidance,

Lord, our God bless us as a congregation, we pray, in all our efforts to serve you in the gospel, enable us to be not only faithful, but effective, enable us to look to you for further empowering by your spirit, and especially, Lord, as we find ourselves so frustrated during these days of confinement in a measure due to the virus that's going around, Lord, our God, we pray that you would open up the way for us, that we may once again be able more openly to engage in the work of the gospel, and Lord, we ask that you would hasten that time when this virus will be overcome, and when we will be able, once again, more openly to interact with others, not only among ourselves in the fellowship of the church, but around us too, Lord, as we seek to take the gospel into our communities.

We ask that your blessing will be tonight with the young folks as they meet in the youth fellowship, be with our elder, Murdo, Lord, as he seeks to bring them the teaching of the Bible in regard to matters of the creation, which is such a current topic in the world.

[18 : 35] Lord, help our young people, we pray, to take the teaching of your word to heart, not only in regard to this, but every other aspect of that teaching of your word, and help them, Lord, to proceed in their own young lives in a way that will not be ashamed of the gospel, in a way that will openly confess you and know you as their God.

And, Lord, we ask that as we come before you also to confess our sins, we pray that you would give us the confidence in your forgiveness that we ought to have.

For we know that when you forgive our sin, that they are truly forgiven, and that Christ has died to secure the forgiveness of his people's sins. And help us, we pray, to be confident that this is the case when we have come to trust in you.

We know that there is nothing in ourselves, O Lord, that gives us confidence, that we are so prone to failure and to lapsing. But we bless you that there is nothing of this with you, or with your promises, or with these facets of your truth.

We pray tonight that you would help us to cling to your truth in its entirety, and in the dynamic of your truth for our lives, so that we may go on, O Lord, in confidence in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

[19 : 55] And so we ask that you would continue with us now, as we turn to your word. O Lord, show to us, we pray, your ways, and show to us also the ways of sin, that we may discern the difference between them, and that we may walk in your ways, and turn from those things, that we know are offensive to you.

Speak tonight to any who are not yet saved. We pray that you would grant, Lord, your spirit to open their hearts. We pray that those who desire after you, will truly come to find that desire fulfilled, in a closing in once again with yourself.

We pray for any who have gone away from following you in obedience, who have strayed away from your truth, and from your church openly, from the gospel, from following after you.

O Lord, be merciful to them, we pray. Reach out and recover them, Lord, we pray. Bring them back into living fellowship with yourself, and with your people, and bring them back to attend upon the means of grace.

We know that this pandemic, O Lord, has caused consternation in many hearts, and that even amongst your own people, there are some that find it difficult, Lord, to reckon with these things.

[21 : 13] And so we pray for them, and pray that you would keep them, and bring them onwards, we pray, in the knowledge of your will, and in acceptance of your wisdom. So receive us now, we pray.

Hear us and accept us, for Jesus' sake. Amen. We turn back again this evening to the letter of Paul to the Philippians, and we're going to read some verses, first of all, Philippians chapter 2, and from verse 19.

Philippians 2 at verse 19, I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.

They all seek their own interest, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father, he has served with me in the gospel.

I hope therefore to send him just as soon, as I see how it will go with me. And I trust in the Lord, that shortly I myself will come also.

[22 : 24] Now we saw, if you recall in verses 1 to 4 of this chapter, how they relate to what's said about Jesus, in verses 5 to 11. The apostle, you recall, is calling on the Philippians to be of the same mind, to do nothing from rivalry or conceit, to count others ahead of them, or more significant than themselves.

And then he comes in, as we saw with this great passage about Jesus, and how Jesus shows that attitude, and that practice, that he would want them as Philippians to follow, in their own lives, in their own church life as well.

And then we saw how that relates to the verses we saw last time, over the last two weeks, verses 12 to 18. How all that he has said before, that is now fed into, the working out of their own salvation, with fear and trembling.

And then we saw how that, is not simply a personal thing, an individual thing, though there is that aspect to it. It comes through also in verses 14 to 18, where he mentions there, that they are to be shining as lights in the world.

So that all the things that have to do, with working out their salvation, as they look back upon what he has said about Jesus, all of that is fed into, how they are to be shining as lights, in the world for God, holding forth or holding fast, to the word of life.

[23 : 47] And as you come to see that emphasis on shining out, it comes to follow through into the passage we're looking at tonight, which mentions especially Timothy.

It's interesting actually that shining as lights in the world is something that was common to all the apostles in their teaching, or to most of them at least. Remember for example, that in 1 Peter chapter 3, verse 15, we find Peter saying, sanctify the Lord Jesus in your hearts.

And always be ready to give an account for the hope that is in you to anyone who asks you. The interesting thing there, among other things, is that for Peter, and indeed for Paul as well, the understanding was that people would come to ask Christians to give them an account of the hope that was in them.

In other words, the light that Paul is speaking of here is the light of a living hope. The light that comes through in those who live for Jesus and show that they have a living hope in contrast to those who don't have that hope in Christ.

And the expectancy then would be that others of the unconverted world would come and ask them, what is this hope? What is this that you're living out? How come your life is so different?

[25 : 05] And that's really what we want to take note of too, that the initiative, as far as Peter was concerned, would come from the world to ask about this hope that is in us. And as we take that with us into tonight's passage, we know that Paul is now giving us, interestingly, two examples of this kind of life.

Firstly, Timothy, we'll see tonight, and then he comes to speak about Epaphroditus in the remainder of the chapter. Now, we all know what a role model is.

Role models are all over the place in the world today. We've got so many different kinds of role models, and our young folks especially, perhaps older ones like ourselves too, have role models.

There are good role models. There are not so good role models, and there are bad role models. The world in which we live sets forth so much of the celebrity lifestyle, the pop lifestyle, film star lifestyle, well-paid footballer lifestyles, as role models.

And of course, a lot of young folks tend to follow them, and in many ways, a role model in that sense of the worldly role model influences how people, even as far as how they will dress, and what sort of hairstyle they will have, and how they act, and even sometimes how they even think about things.

[26 : 22] But Paul gives us two role models when he speaks here about Timothy and Epaphroditus. And they are role models that are very much in keeping with the lifestyle that he's calling on these Philippians to have for themselves, patterned upon, and indeed in likeness to Jesus.

Because both of these individuals, Timothy and Epaphroditus, are described in ways that fit in with that passage about Jesus, and the way that he put others ahead of himself.

And so it follows through into the teaching of the passage here tonight, again, that we find here somebody who is a role model, this Timothy, as a Christ-like life, he is shining as a light in the darkness.

Now, God has placed a role model somewhere in your life and my life too. Because I doubt if there's anybody here tonight that cannot put their finger on someone or some people that they know or they are familiar with that are role models in a good way.

People that you know are so definitely Christians. People that you know are Christ-like in the way they set about their lives. People that you know are influential in your own thinking, that you'd want to be like, that you seek to measure up to.

[27 : 46] And that's important for us to notice as well. This is not just something that's back in the days of the Philippians and confined to that. In fact, Paul himself speaks in chapter 3 here, doesn't he, in verse 17, Brothers, join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

Well, you might say that's bold language, but then Paul knows that what he's doing in his life as a Christian is worthy of following the pattern of his life. And so he's saying the kind of people that we are as apostles, as Christians, take note of that and put that against those who are walking as enemies of the cross of Christ as he goes on to say in chapter 3.

So tonight we're looking especially at Timothy as a role model as he set out before us in the description that's here. And there are two things about him that we can mention briefly. First of all, Timothy's Christ-like concern for the Philippians.

His Christ-like concern. He's saying to him here, I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare, for they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

Then he speaks secondly about Timothy's Christ-like service. He goes on to say, you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.

[29 : 13] Timothy's Christ-like concern and Timothy's Christ-like service. And that Christ-like concern, he mentions as we said, where Paul is saying, I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.

And there's something interesting about the terms that he uses there, genuinely concerned. The word genuinely itself has in it the idea, something like the idea of having been influenced by a parentage, by a parent or by some sort of parentage or upbringing like that.

In fact, if you look at the AV, the word that's used there is naturally. I have no one like him who will be naturally concerned for your well-being. And it seems that what you have there really is the kind of spiritual parentage that is behind our new birth.

When a person is born again, the parentage there is God. It is God who brings about that change in a person's life that's described as being born again.

In other words, when he speaks here about Timothy, he's not at all, Timothy's not at all someone who's just putting on an act in his Christian life. It's not that he is just simply an artificial kind of lifestyle.

[30 : 35] He's not simply copied something that he's seen in Paul, though there might be an element of that in it. This is something that has arisen out of the change that took place in his life.

This divine parentage, this born-again Christian, this person who has come to know Jesus, that's what lies behind the way that he lives his life and is concerned for the welfare of the Philippians.

It arises, as the AV puts it, naturally out of that changed heart. And you know, that's something that you can follow that through for yourself as a Christian.

Because when God changed your life, if you're born again here tonight, God and that change that took place in your life, he didn't just bring that about for your private consumption, as it were, for your private enjoyment.

When he brings you to know himself and to know his salvation, then he gives you a concern for the world around you, and he gives you a concern for his people. We read there through Colossians chapter 4, and you note the number of times that Paul mentions there different people, some he mentions by name, and as he presents that to the Colossians, he presents that to them so that they'll pray about this, that they'll think about this, that they'll remember these people, that they'll think, I belong to the same church as they do, they're in a different place in the world.

[32 : 00] You see, when God changes us, he gives us that concern. And the word concern also here is actually a very strong word. He will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.

It has two sides to it. You could say, on the one hand, you've got in chapter 4, and the beginning of verse 6 there, well-known words, where he's saying, do not be anxious, or over-anxious, overly concerned about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication.

Well, that's the word, that's one side of concern. That's a concern with anxiety. And anxiety is something that we're very familiar with in our generation, and very familiar with in the day in which we live.

People have an anxiety problem. People have an over-anxiety problem caused by very many different things. That's one side of the word. But the word, as it's used here in chapter 2, is the other side of it, where there's a genuine concern for the well-being, a burden, if you like, for the well-being of this church in Philippi.

And that's what Timothy is marked by. He has a burden for these Christians in Philippi. He has a burden for their welfare. He is concerned for them in a spiritual, prayerful way.

[33 : 19] And that's what's here as a characteristic of his life. Now, that's an important emphasis, really, in itself. We could widen out that point if we had time, much, if we had time, we could say much on that.

But let me just say one or two things here. To be burdened for the church is very much an aspect of the Christian life, where God, as we said, has opened our hearts for our own salvation.

He burdens us in a good way. Think, for example, of how you find a way back in the book of Psalms and Psalm 137, a psalm that has to do with the suffering of God's people and God's cause and their captivity, the straits that they are in, the waters of Babylon.

We sat down, we wept, when we remembered Zion. Zion is really the name in many ways for the church there in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms. We hung up our liars on the willows and our tormentors said, sing us one of the songs of Zion.

How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? Then he says this, if I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill, let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

[34 : 47] There is the psalmist in captivity, there is the psalmist in the captivity of Babylon. What is his mind on? What is he burdened about? It's not his own condition there in Babylon, but Jerusalem, the cause of God, Zion, that's where his heart is, that's where his thoughts are.

Many theologians in the past used to speak of the church as the mother of Christians. And by that they meant that it's in the visible church that we find our nourishment, that more often than not our birth spiritually takes place.

Ciprian, one of the earliest, lived around the early third century, said, a person cannot have God as his father unless he also has the church as his mother.

What he meant by that was on Calvin, John Calvin, a great reformer, added to that and had no embarrassment of speaking about the church as the mother of Christians because that's where we receive our nourishment, that's where we are brought up, that's where we are in our spiritual infancy, if you like.

And we come to know the Lord, where are we going to get fed? Where are we going to get the gospel? Where are we going to be brought up? And where are we going to develop in our spiritual lives? In the church, that's why being in the church is so important.

[36 : 09] That's why being part of the church is so important. That's why belonging to the church is so important. And when you think of the church as a spiritual mother, this is a very useful way of thinking about the mother's condition.

if our natural mother is very ill, if our natural mother is seriously ill, our concern for her would be for her recovery, for her comfort, to remember her, to do everything for her that we could unless we're hard-hearted or don't really care.

And when you think of the church as our spiritual mother, that's one of the things that in this day and generation we belong to. We're entering into a week of prayer, friends.

What are we praying for? It's not just for the world out there. We're praying for our spiritual mother because throughout our land and throughout the world, mother is sick. Mother is unwell.

Mother is unwell. Mother is suffering from different illnesses. Liberal theology. worldliness. Mother has sometimes gone back, as it were, into the cupboards of the world and brought out the garments of the world and put that on her children.

[37 : 31] And when mother is sick, we must be concerned. Concerned to pray. Concerned to remember. Concerned to do everything possible once again for the recovery of our mother.

Our spiritual nourisher. I have no one like him, said Paul. Genuinely concerned for your welfare.

And in that way, he's a contrast to others, as Paul is saying. I have no one like him, for they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

Now, that's really very strong language that Paul is using. And in some ways, I suppose, he's exaggerating someone just to make the point about Timothy. After all, not everybody apart from Timothy cared for their own interests first.

For example, there's Epaphroditus for a start. But he's saying this so that the quality of Timothy and Timothy's Christian life will come through and will be emphasized.

[38 : 36] And Timothy's not like the majority that Paul knows of who are Christians, who confess to be Christians, who belong to the church.

But Paul is saying there is nobody like him because they all seek their own interests. I mean, Timothy could have listened to the majority, we presume, who might have said, well, you know, Paul's really demanding far too much of you.

He's really demanding so much. We're not going to actually follow that closely. We're not going to give so much of our own time as Paul would advocate.

You need to actually relax somewhat. You need to just give up some of those concerns that you have to be wholehearted for the Lord, et cetera, et cetera. But Timothy's, even if he had such a temptation, he didn't give in to it.

I have no one like him. says the apostle, because they all seek their own interests, not the interests of Christ.

[39 : 40] What is a Christian? What is a Christian? How do you know a Christian when you see one? Well, it's not just because a person has a change of life that's obvious in the way that they go about their life.

It's not just that they actually attend services of worship like this or go to prayer meetings, all well and good and all unnecessary in their own way. But a Christian also has to include someone who puts the interests of others before their own.

Somebody who is following a Christ-like life. That's where the great challenge of the apostle comes to us, to me and to you tonight. Here is Timothy. Who is Timothy? What is he like?

What does Paul say he is? He is like Jesus. How is he like Jesus? Because he's not putting his own interests first, but those of the Philippians, those of other people.

And that links it, of course, to verses 3 to 5 and also to the verses 5 to 11 about Jesus himself. So whose interest then am I putting first tonight?

[40 : 51] Am I putting your interests before my own as someone called to be your minister? I have to reckon with that. I have to reckon with that before God and I have to deal with that in the presence of God as all of us ministers have to.

And what about yourselves, those who are professing Christians, those who are saved? What is your interest? What is your chief interest? Whose interests are you putting first?

Is it those of Jesus or is it those that affect yourself? Because it's very interesting the way that Paul here equates the interests of Christ with Timothy's interest and concern for the Philippians, isn't it?

He is saying, I have no one like him genuinely concerned for your welfare. They all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. In other words, the interests of Christ. What are the interests of Christ?

Well, you might say the investment that Jesus has put into his people, the investment that Jesus has put into salvation for his people. Jesus has invested, if you like to use the word in a spiritual sense, he has invested to the extent of giving his life.

[42 : 03] That's what verses 5 to 11 was all about. He took the form of a servant and was obedient unto death. He put the interests of his people first. And here is Paul saying, this is Timothy as a Christ-like man following that pattern of life, he is genuinely concerned for your welfare, for the interests of Christ ahead of his own.

And you know, if you're unsaved tonight, if you haven't yet come to yield to Christ's own call upon your life, which you know is addressed to you in the gospel, if you haven't responded in faith to Jesus' offer of life, to the call of Christ in the gospel to come to him, to place your trust in him, to give yourself to him, if you haven't yet done that, just think of this.

Whose interests are you putting first? They're not his. It's your own. You're putting yourself ahead of him when you don't actually come to give yourself to him.

See, here, friends, tonight is not just a challenge, it's also a great comfort to know that it's God himself who's assuring us that when we come to place Jesus first, however difficult the going might be, Christ himself will look after us as he looked after Timothy in the midst of his difficulties.

So, Timothy's Christ-like concern is emphasized by the apostle and his genuine concern in the way that he contrasts with the majority that Paul is speaking of.

[43 : 51] Secondly, Timothy's Christ-like service. For you know, he said, his proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.

Now, of course, Timothy was Paul's spiritual son, not a natural son, but a spiritual son, someone who had been influenced by the apostles' preaching and had come to know the Lord through the apostle Paul.

And here he is, now being spoken of by Paul as like a father with a son serving with him in the gospel. And there's something very, very interesting here and very significant in this description, again, that Paul gives.

Because the word that he uses here for serving in the gospel, that verb served, the noun equivalent of that is back in the chapter speaking about Jesus becoming the servant of God.

That is what he said, remember, though he was in the form of God, did not count that with equality with God, a thing to be held on to, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant.

[45 : 04] The word in Greek is doulos. You know that word well, I'm sure. There was a gospel ship called a doulos. This word is the word they used for that ship, which was a mercy ship, a ship that brought the gospel to different parts of the world.

And that word doulos, that word servant, really means bond servant, literally means slave, but slave in a good sense here, joined to Christ, slave in the sense in which being committed to Christ and owned by Christ means a life of seeking to please Christ.

Christ. That's what he's saying about Timothy, that how as a son with a father, he has served with me in the gospel. You see, he's Christ-like in this respect too, that as Jesus, the Son of God, became the servant and was willing to become the servant and was willing to put others ahead of himself in becoming that servant, even unto death, so Timothy is his image, if you like.

he has served with me in the gospel. And he says, served with me as a son with a father.

Well, as a son with a father really captures for us the sense in which a good father will inspire his son or daughter to take things from his life that they will seek to emulate.

[46 : 29] When we're good fathers, as the Bible encourages us to be, then our sons, unless they're disobedient, will actually follow that and see in us something of that pattern and image of Christ himself.

And he's saying here, as a son with a father, a good son with a good father, we'll seek to emulate that father. We'll seek to follow that father's values and we'll seek to support that father whenever that support is required.

Well, all of that's built into this description. You know, Timothy's proven worth how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. He's come to be a bond servant of Jesus in the gospel.

And how many experiences that entailed? How many difficulties? How many challenges? How many changes in Timothy and in Paul's experience serving in the gospel, being servants of Christ actually entailed?

You might be saying, well, that's all very well, but these were spiritual giants. I mean, you can't expect us surely to try to emulate the likes of a Timothy in the world in which we live.

[47 : 47] Because these were almost super believers, weren't they? Is that what you're thinking? Well, if it is, then you're wrong. Because Timothy, for one, was somebody who had struggles in his life.

It seems he had struggles with certain fears, struggles sometimes with insecurity. Remember what Paul said to him when he wrote a second letter in the second letter of Timothy in chapter 1, verses 7 to 8.

this is how Paul actually wrote to him. For this reason, he said, after reminding him of how he had come to faith and how he had such a blessed background in his grandmother and his mothers who were Christians and how he saw that and was influenced, I'm sure, by that.

But he says, for this reason, I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. In other words, he's saying to Timothy, you have this background, you have this wonderful privilege of that upbringing, but now you must fan into flame this gift that God has given you, this gift of being a servant, this gift of being a preacher of the gospel.

You mustn't leave it lying, you mustn't give in to the temptation of just leaving it dormant or letting it cool down, you must fan it into flame. Why? He says, because God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and self-control.

[49 : 23] And he goes on, therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me, his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God who saved us and called us to a holy calling.

That's what he's saying, share in suffering for the gospel. None of us is naturally inclined to actually give ourselves wholly to the work of the gospel.

When we're called to minister in the gospel, there are so many things that come into our mind that present our unfitness, the fears that come into our minds.

It's the same for you as Christians. In serving the Lord in this world, however it is you would have to serve him in your place of work in the congregation, serving him by coming to take communion, presenting yourselves as professing Christians or want to be that.

There are so many fears, aren't there? There are so many things that really have to deal with our insecurity, with our sense of insecurity, with our fear perhaps of what's waiting out there for us in the world if we come openly to acknowledge Christ.

[50 : 34] Well, there is Paul saying this was actually how Timothy was. He wasn't a super believer. He had fears to reckon with. He had wrestled with his insecurity, but he overcame them.

How did he overcome them? Well, he overcame them as Paul wrote to him there in 1 Timothy, by the grace of God, by the power that God gives to his people.

So, tonight, don't be afraid to step out in faith, in obedience to Christ, in whatever aspect of your life, you know that Christ is calling you to do this.

God willing, we have a communion set for the beginning of a new year. You haven't yet come to take communion, and you do know the Lord, and you know that God is calling you to do this.

Think of it in this way. Your insecurity is understandable. Your sense of insecurity is understandable. Your fears are understandable. They're there with most of us.

[51 : 40] But when we step out in faith, we don't do so on the basis of waiting for a sudden onrush of grace that enables us to do this.

The grace is promised us along with a step of obedience, as we do that in remembrance of him. The grace that's promised us is along the lines of him promising that he will never leave us and never forsake us.

That's where we have to bring our insecurities, our sense of fear, our thoughts about the world around us and what that might entail if we commit our lives to Christ.

Paul dealt with the thorn in the flesh the same way as God taught him. In 2 Corinthians 12, three times he pleaded with the Lord to take this away.

Whatever it was we're not told, but it was painful. And God said to him, my grace is sufficient for you. In other words, God was saying to him, I'm not going to take it away, but I'm going to give you something that would enable you to overcome it.

[52 : 50] Not just to cope with it, but to overcome it and to serve me, though this is going to be with you in your life. Then he said, Here is your weakness, here is my weakness.

What do you do with it? Do you allow it to keep you back? Do you allow it to say, no, I can't really go that far in my life, spiritually, in my service for the Lord? No, you don't. You say, this is what the Lord is calling me to do.

This is my privilege to witness for him. This is my privilege to be a light in this darkness for him. This is my privilege to show against the darkness of the world in which I live that there is a beauty in Christ, that there is a power in Christ, that there is not only sufficiency and worth in Christ, but that he's indispensable.

And my grace, he says, is sufficient for you. The power of Christ will rest upon you. And so he's saying, he has proved in serving with me in the gospel.

There then are the two outstanding Christians, Timothy and Epaphroditus that we'll see next time we come to it, God willing.

[54 : 09] Timothy's Christ-like concern, and Timothy's Christ-like service. But there's actually a third. There's Paul himself.

He maybe doesn't say it specifically, he wants to point to Timothy and Epaphroditus, but the way he speaks shows very much of himself as well. And you see the way that this passage begins in verse 19 and ends in verse 24.

He's saying, first, I hope in the Lord Jesus, and then he closes it by saying, I trust in the Lord. In other words, there's the envelope into which the other verses there are packed.

And as he folds the envelope, and as we just listen to these words, I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you. I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come to you.

What is Paul saying? I don't know if I'm going to die or not for certain. I'm trusting in the Lord Jesus that I will come to you as well as Timothy, but it's in Jesus' hands.

[55 : 14] That's what he's saying. Every single detail is under the rule of Christ. And so it must be with me and with you as well.

Whatever he's calling upon you to do, remember, you're not doing it outside of his sovereignty, outside of his kingship, outside of his lordship, outside of his promise to look after you.

So be a Timothy. Trust in the Lord. Give yourself to his service, and you too will be a light in this world for him.

Let's pray. Lord, our gracious God, sanctify our hearts, we pray, to receive your word, not only for these moments that we are gathered here, but throughout life itself.

Lord, constantly we pray, guide us by your truth, and by your spirit, empower us to live for you. We ask that your blessing will follow us now through this week, especially as we come to think of prayer, and the importance, and the place of prayer in the life of your people.

[56 : 25] Lord, our God, help us to commit ourselves to that. We pray all this in Jesus' name, and for his sake. Amen. Now, we're concluding our service tonight by singing in Psalm 119.

Psalm 119, the Sing Psalms version of it, that's on page 167, and these verses marked 161-168. Though rulers hound me without cause, my heart fears nothing but your word, for in your promise I rejoice, like one who finds great spoil, O Lord.

And verse 167, I will observe your statutes, Lord, my love for them is great and true, your laws and precepts I obey, for all my ways are known to you.

Let's sing these four verses in conclusion. The rulers have me without cause, my heart fears nothing but your word, for in your promise I rejoice, like one who finds great spoil, O Lord.

All falsehood I have warranty, with with all my heart I love you love you love I praise you seven times a day for your command I hold in all great peace have those who love you Lord they will not stumble in the way I wait for your salvation

[59 : 00] Lord Lord and your commands I will obey I will observe your statutes Lord my love for them is great and true your laws and precepts I obey for all my ways are known to you now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore

Amen