

## Week 6: Gospel Examples

### Chapter 2:19-30

**So far...** we've seen Paul's affection and gratitude for the Philippian church, and his desire for them to grow in Gospel-centred love. Paul testifies to his desire to boldly glorify Jesus whether by life or by death, and then urges the church to humble Gospel-centred unity. He challenges them to follow the example of Jesus Himself, for the purpose that they would shine like stars in the darkness of this world.

#### **Timothy's Faithful Service**

*"you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel." (2:22)*

As Paul continues to exhort the Philippian church to love, humility and unity, his letter just naturally contains some profound examples of those who are already living exactly the life that he is calling them to. Firstly he speaks of himself being poured out as a drink offering, given away for the sake of the Philippians joy and faith. Then he moves on to talk about Timothy, and outlines for us the journey that he has been on up to this point, when Paul can genuinely say 'I have no one like him'.

You see, Timothy didn't jump into Paul's apostolic team as the finished article - a ready made wing-man for Paul in his labours to see the church grow and be built up. Timothy came unto Paul's team with a great foundation of faith, learned from his mother and grandmother (2 Tim 1:5) but also, as the Scriptures seem to indicate, a timid young man (1 Tim 4:12, 2 Tim 1:7) in need of confidence and courage to carry out the work that God had for him.

So how did Timothy get from the probably timid young man, to the seasoned disciple to whom Paul is

willing to trust his most important missions? The answer is in our verse above - Timothy went through a Gospel apprenticeship as he served faithfully with Paul as a son might have done with his father. For years, Timothy was willing to be in the background, maybe doing menial jobs while watching Paul do the 'glamorous' work of preaching and teaching. Timothy didn't seek the limelight for himself - go off and set up his own ministry and branch off by himself - he faithfully took care of his part of the ministry that Paul carried.

This is exactly the way the Bible says ministry should be carried. We can be so keen sometimes to dive into work that we're just not ready to do because it might seem more important when Jesus himself said these words: 'One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much' (Luke 16:10). We need to show ourselves faithful in the little before God will entrust us with much, and that's exactly what Timothy did.

#### **For Discussion:**

How can we apply this principle to the place we are at in the 'ministry' God may have given us?

#### **Other Verses for study:**

• Matt 25:14-30    • 1 Tim 1:12-20    • Luke 12:35-48

## The Attitude of a Servant

*"For 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."* (2:20-21)

As Paul continues to speak about Timothy and the complete faith he has in him, he also opens up the depths of human selfishness that still exists even after a person comes to Christ. Paul says that he has no-one else who he can send to the Philippians because all the others aside from Timothy 'seek their own interests'. He can't be talking about people out in the world here because he'd never even consider sending them to the church. This must be others in the church who Paul looks at and thinks 'even in their service they still seem to be primarily looking after themselves and not truly giving themselves away for the good of others.'

Doesn't this just go to show how deep the change must be for us to truly become the disciples that God wants us to be. Our selfishness runs deeper than we know, and so the power needed to deliver us from it must be greater. Thankfully, by the power of the Holy Spirit we can truly change, and this was the reality for Timothy - Paul knows that he is different - he will genuinely care for the needs of the church in Philippi. He won't lord it over them as if he thinks

## The Radical Love of Epaphroditus

*"...for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me."* (2:30)

Having spoken of his desire to send pastorally-hearted Timothy to the church, Paul now moves on to speak about a man who travelled in the other direction. Epaphroditus was from the church in Philippi, and it seems they sent him to visit Paul with a gift to help with Paul and his team's support. What happens on this trip is yet another example of the radical love and self-sacrifice that the Gospel calls us to.

Firstly we find out that Epaphroditus' trip was quite an eventful one to say the least. As he travels the long and probably difficult journey to see Paul, we hear that Epaphroditus fell ill - so ill in fact that Paul says he nearly lost his life (2:30). This soldier for Christ is a powerful example of one who literally was willing to give up his life for the sake of a brother or sister - in this case as a demonstration of the Philippian church's love for the Apostle Paul.

However, that isn't the end of it - what may well be even more remarkable is Epaphroditus' reaction to falling ill. Most of us may well have been moping around, expecting others to take care of us because

he's greater than them, or serve them simply to show off how gifted he is. Timothy will serve this church with an attitude of love that does exactly what Paul has urged this church to do - prefers others needs over its own.

This is what real love looks like, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13 - you can do all kinds of seemingly impressive things and yet not have love for those you are serving. You can even be martyred for your faith Paul says (1 Cor 13:3) and be doing it ultimately for your own aims. On the flip side, real love may not look that impressive at all, but even that is not what matters. What really counts is the attitude that something is done out of, and this is what we should be praying that God would work inside of our own hearts. Only He can truly work this change within us, but we can be confident He's willing to do so as we faithfully play our part and do what we can to give ourselves away for the good of those around us.

### For Discussion:

How can we know whether we are acting out of love or not, and how can we grow in this attitude?

### Other Verses for study:

• Luke 6:27-36 • 1 Cor 13:1-13 • 1 John 3:11-24, 4:7-21

we were ill, but not Epaphroditus - he's not even thinking about himself at all. Epaphroditus' distress is not caused by his own illness, but he's distressed because he's heard that the church have found out that he's ill - he's more worried about the church worrying about him than he is about losing his own life.

This kind of attitude is in such contrast to the normal way of the world, but doesn't it remind you of the way Jesus was? In His moment of greatest pain and suffering as Jesus was hanging on the cross, who was He thinking about? He wasn't thinking about saving Himself, but He cries out 'Father forgive them' - declares His love for those who were treating Him so cruelly. Epaphroditus is just another in a long line of heroes of faith, along with Paul, Timothy and many others. These are the great witnesses we are surrounded by, who call us not to live our lives for ourselves, but to give ourselves away for something far greater. May God help us to follow their example in all that we do.

### For Discussion:

What motivates a person have this kind of self-sacrificial attitude?

### Other Verses for study:

• Matthew 16:24-28 • Romans 12:1-2