**Philippians 2:19-30**

In our study of Philippians this morning we meet two friends of the Apostle Paul. They are real men who quite unconsciously display the character of Jesus Christ, excellent examples of all Paul has been writing about. READ Philippians 2:19-30

 *19I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that Ialso may be cheered when I re­ceive news about you.*

*20I have no one else like him, who will show gen­u­ine con­cern for your wel­fare.*

*21For ev­ery­one looks out for their own in­ter­ests, not those ofJesus Christ.*

*22But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he  has served with me in the work of the gos­pel.*

*23I hope, there­fore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me.*

*24And I am con­fi­dent in the Lord that I my­self will come soon.*

*25But I think it is nec­es­sary to send back to you Epaph­ro­di­tus, my broth­er, co-worker*

*and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of*

*my needs.*

*26For he longs for all of you and is dis­tressed be­cause you heard he was ill.*

*27Indeed, he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sor­row upon sor­row.*

*28Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you*

*may be glad and I may have less anx­i­ety.*

*29So then, wel­come him in the Lord with great joy, and hon­or peo­ple like him,*

*30because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you your­selves could not give me."I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by news of you. I have no one like him, who will be genuinely anxious for your welfare. They all look after their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But Timothy's worth you know, 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 shall come also."*

In these passages (2:19-30) we see manhood as God intended man to be. That is what we have in the two men we will meet in this part of Paul's letter to the Philippians. The names of these men are well known to us. We have already met one, Timothy, in our study of Acts last year. And now Epaphroditus, whom we meet only in the book of Philippians. Timothy is still a young man, the other is probably in middle or upper middle age. The name, Timothy, means "God honoring". Epaphroditus means "Charming". I think these two men lived up to their names. Now let's meet these men.

Timothy, we met earlier, and you remember he was a young teenager when Paul and Barnabas were making their first missionary journey. They came to the city of Lystra (SE Turkey), as recorded in the book of Acts, and there they were welcomed as representations of the Greek gods, Jupiter and Mercury. Then the fickle crowd turned against them and they were beaten, and Paul was stoned and left to die outside the city gates. God had mercy on him and sent him back into the city. It was on that occasion that he met this young lad, Timothy, who had been raised by his mother (Eunice) and grandmother (Lois), who was of half Jewish, half Gentile heritage. He had a very frail constitution as we gather from Paul's letter to him. Notably he had a weak stomach. Everyone since that time who suffers in this way has had great sympathy with Timothy. It was to him that Paul wrote that famous admonition, "*use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments*." So, here is a boy who had a rather frail makeup, but he had a keen and eager spirit, and a loyal and tender heart. He was a dear son in the faith to the apostle Paul.

Epaphroditus was a member of the church in Philippi. We don't know how this happened; it's unlikely he was a convert of the apostle Paul since Paul never mentions that. He was probably led to Christ by other members of the church there. We don't know his trade or profession, but he was chosen by the church to come to Rome and bring a gift from them to the apostle while he was in prison there.

Now here are two quite different personalities. The backgrounds and temperaments of these men are widely dissimilar. One is an earnest, quiet, reserved man by natural predisposition. The other is outgoing, warmhearted, charming. One we would call an introvert, the other an extrovert. But now let's see what Christ has done with each of these men, as we have this picture of them in this lovely little letter from Paul to the Philippians.

First, we meet Timothy in verses 19-24. As Paul writes about him, we see the underlying quality that marks the man is Jesus Christ. First of all, we see that Timothy is an *exceptional* man. Paul says, "*I have no one like him*." Wouldn't you like to have that written about you? I know there were many things at which Timothy did not excel. With his frail body he almost certainly was not much of an athlete. He could very easily have been beaten at sports, or possibly surpassed in learning. But there was one area, Paul says, where no one even comes close to this man, and that is in his selfless care, his demonstration of genuine and anxious concern for the welfare of others. Here he is demonstrating that peculiarly Christian virtue, that distinctive mark of the presence of Christ within - unselfishness! That is what the Lord Jesus said of himself, "*Learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart*" (Mt. 11:29).

The other day I read a definition of meekness that I think is tremendous. I've been searching for a definition of that word for years. I don't know any word in Scripture that is more thoroughly misunderstood than that. Most of us think of meekness in terms of weakness. We picture some chinless, Casper Milquetoast who lets people walk all over him. But of course, that description would never apply to our Lord. What did he mean when he said, "*I am meek*?” I read that "*meekness is that quality which receives injury without resentment, and praise without pride."* Lead me say that again--"*meekness is that quality which receives injury without resentment, and praise without pride."* Timothy is demonstrating that utter unconcern for the rights and privileges of self, and an outgoing, deep and genuine concern for the needs of others.

I don't know quite what Paul means when he says, "*for all others look after their own interests.*" I rather think, however, this tells a bit of a story, for as Paul searched among his acquaintances there in Rome for someone to go to Philippi, he must have asked a number of them to do this. Evidently all of them turned him down. Not because they couldn't do it--I'm sure Paul would not have asked them if that had been the case--but you can see something of a reflection of Paul's grieved heart. They turned him down because they were interested solely in their own concerns. They all had perfectly good excuses why none could undertake the journey to Philippi. The only one to whom Christ's business was his business was Timothy. You can imagine what an encouragement he must have been to the apostle's heart as he is longing to send someone to the Philippians to help them with their problems and everyone turns him down simply because of their own selfish concerns. But Timothy says, "*All right, Paul, I'm ready to go--any time, any place, anywhere*." This was the generosity of this man. No wonder he was always a channel of power wherever he went, as he went ready to be an instrument of God's grace.

There is something else here. Timothy didn't go there to take a survey of the needs, or to analyze the problem and set up a program. He went with sympathy, to meet a genuine need. He didn't go as the Chairman of Christian Welfare. He went as a human being with a heart concern for their need. We need to get away from this kind of professional care of one another and discover again something of the self-sacrificing ministry of a Timothy.

Paul says Timothy is an *experienced* man. He is not only exceptional, but experienced. He has already proved himself as a son with a father in the ministry. That is a delicate revelation of the relationship between these two men. I think there are clearly three things. A son with a father shares mutual life; that is, they have one blood, one common resource. Certainly, this was true of Paul and Timothy. In Christ they shared one life. A son and father share mutual love for one another, a love with ingredients of respect, affection and trust. The result of these two--mutual life and mutual love--was mutual labor as well. They collaborated, they fulfilled one another. They shared the same responsibilities and hardships. Timothy has been through many such experiences with the apostle. He has proved himself, all of it stemming from that marvelous relationship they had together in Christ.

The lasting impression of this man we gain from Paul, somewhat implied in verses 23 and 24, is that he was an *encouraging* man. Paul says, "*I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me*." In other words, he couldn't let him go just yet. He hopes to be set free as he faces trial before Caesar, and in fact as he states elsewhere, he is quite confident he will be, but he wants to keep Timothy there until he is. What a comfort this man must have been to the apostle.

You remember in the second letter Paul writes to Timothy some years later when, we believe, he has been set free from his first imprisonment and then again is captured-we don't know when or why--and is once again brought to Rome. This time instead of being given a hired home where he could meet with his friends, he is cast into the dingy darkness of the Mamertine dungeon there in Rome (If you go to Rome, you can still see the famous Mamertine prison. Tradition says that both Peter and Paul were in that prison just before they were executed). From there he writes his second letter to Timothy, in that heartbreaking and pathetic phrase, "*Do your best to come to me before winter.*" He is longing to have this man with him during the long, weary days of his last imprisonment. Timothy was the kind of man you wanted around in such times. He was an encourager. By nature, he was an introvert, and Timothy in Christ is just the kind of man you want to have around. Paul votes for him as "*the man I'd most like to spend a long winter with*." By his selfless spirit, and his trustworthy, encouraging life he has indeed lived up to his name. He has done honor to the God whom he loves, whose name he bears, whose life he manifests. There is a man of God!

Now in verses 25-30 we meet another man, Epaphroditus. Here is a man of different temperament from Timothy. Epaphroditus is the one who brought the gift from Philippi and the one who bore this wonderful letter back to the Philippian church. His popularity is evident from the fact that he was chosen by the church for this difficult task. We can gather from this letter that he was probably one of those friendly, courteous, well-liked men whose natural disposition makes him popular and prominent in any group. Again, Paul outlines the qualities he most appreciates in Epaphroditus.

The first one is *helpfulness.* Notice he says, "*I am sending you my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need*." All of this is spelling out a helpful disposition. "*Brother*" again speaks of that family life, a mutual source of life in Christ. My "*fellow worker*" is a revelation of how they labored together in full fellowship and with a common interest. "*Fellow soldier*" is one who shares a common loyalty and adherence to the same cause as the apostle. He is the "*messenger*" of the Philippians. The word really is "*apostle.*" He is an ambassador, a representative of someone else. The last word, "*minister,*" is really the word for "priest," a sacred servant.

All these wonderful titles add up to one who is a marvelous helper, one given to faithful laborer with other people, selfless concern that is the distinctive mark of the believer in Jesus Christ. We saw the same quality in Timothy. In 2:26 we read of Epaphroditus, "*for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill*." Word had gotten back to Philippi that this man had been terribly sick, and Epaphroditus is concerned that they be over-anxious about him. He is stressed because they heard he was ill.

But note that there is no self-pity in Epaphroditus. Evidently, he had learned to count self-interest and self-seeking as the unprofitable thing that it is, and he has learned to reckon on the indwelling self-giving love of Christ. His concern is not one of self-pity because he was so desperately sick, but of anxiety lest they be over-wrought in their worry for him. Even in the midst of his own personal distress of a most serious nature, he has learned to manifest the selfless concern for others. What a beautiful picture. He has learned to labor *with* others and to be concerned *for* others. You can see the character of Christ in him.

Now there is an interesting side note here, and that is concerning the illness of Epaphroditus. You notice it doesn't say anything at all about Paul exercising the gift of healing. This is one of those cases it is well to refer to when you run into someone who claims that all sickness is of the devil, and God of course must heal everyone who has enough faith. Surely if anyone had all the faith necessary to obtain a healing it would have been Paul. But here he is with his friend and there is not a word of his exercising the gift of healing, or laying hands on him, but he says, "*Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.*" You see not all sickness is intended to be healed. We have to face that fact. Thank God for it when it can be, but it isn't always. Remember Paul had a “*thorn in the flesh*.”

The final characteristic of this man is a willingness to hazard his life in ministry. Verse 30: "*For he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete your service to me."* He laid his own life on the line. It is the word for gambling--he gambled his life, counting it "*not dear unto himself*", as we read of Paul in another place. Some scholars think this is another reference to the illness Epaphroditus suffered here with Paul, perhaps caused by his long journey, but I doubt that. I doubt Paul would have sent him back on that same long journey if he had become ill on the first journey.

I think the illness came after the arrival of Epaphroditus in Rome, and the risking of his life is quite another matter connected with his service for Paul. You remember that Paul was a prisoner here under the charge of sedition against the Emperor, a very serious charge. For that reason, he never was for one moment free from being chained to a guard. Though he lived in his own rented house he was continually chained to a Roman guard. To help him under these circumstances would undoubtedly have serious implications for the helper. Evidently something occurred in which fearless Epaphroditus, at great risk of his own life, helped the apostle in his time of need. There was a kind of holy recklessness about this man. He is quite willing to lay his own life on the line where the cause of Christ is concerned, to lose His life for Christ's sake.

While preparing for this study I ran across this tribute to Epaphroditus. The writer says,” What *a tonic it is to run up against a man who has said goodbye to himself. A man who is not burdened with his own burdens, and cares nothing for his cares. A man who will not serve his money, his strength, his time, because he hasn't time; he is so busy winning others. The kind of man who will not be coaxed into cataloging trials and will not for a thousand worlds stop when he is stopped. I met this kind of daredevil soul in my meditations this morning and we had a first-class time together.*

*The one thing that struck me about him was that his eyes were in good seeing condition. He could see the need. The next thing that struck me was that he had made up his mind the need must be met and if there was no one in sight who would tackle it he would himself go at it. He knew it would cost something if he did, because the job was likely to be trying and difficult. Had he not said goodbye to himself the task would not have been looked at and the need would in all probability remain just a need. But having been divorced forever from the take-it-easy, go-slow, take-care-of-yourself, lay-up-for-a-rainy-day spirit, he had become a gambler and was ready at a moment's notice to gamble away his life in any undertaking which had Christ at the beginning and at the end of it.*

*You could not speak to him for five minutes without discovering that he had a holy disregard for obstacles and difficulties, and a holy contempt for loneliness, hardship and pain. His great pleasure in life was to sacrifice, although I never once heard him use the word. To tell the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, he was nearly dead on one occasion as a result of his absolute recklessness. What did he care whether he had three meals a day or no meals at all? He had been taught from the time he was born again that the only way to save his life was by losing it. He had also had some contact with an old hardened fighter (Paul) who urged him not to count his life dear unto himself, and told him that he was not to think of going into good times for himself when the world was having a very bad time in the hands of sin and the devil.*

*I was not surprised that he did what he did, regardless of what happened to his life, because his life did not belong to him but to Jesus Christ. He could not help himself. If he was mad, it was his own madness. He had received it from one who in his own day was said to be "beside himself." I wish you could have heard him laugh at his troubles. He treated his little pains with the contempt they deserved. It was quite a joke to hear people say he would die if he did not take care. By that time, he had forgotten how to do that, and furthermore he was not afraid he would be turned down in heaven if he arrived early. I could see that this giant had no tomorrow on his program. He did not become alarmed if he found the bank balance was empty. He carried with him at all times the thing that fills the bank balance when the time comes. That is faith. When he was misunderstood and had to suffer, he handed out no receipts for what he had received. You could not tell from his records how many kicks he had received, or how many nasty things had been said to him and about him. I say again, he made no entries in his ledger and made no receipts. It was a perfect treat to meet this downright and upright gentleman. The name of my friend is Epaphroditus and he lives in Philippians 2.”*

That's quite a tribute, isn't it? Did you notice something about these two men, Timothy and Epaphroditus--two quite different personalities, weren't they? But the same essential character in each, for the secret of these two men is not that they struggled and tried to live heroic lives with a devil-may-care attitude. But shining through each man's life is the splendor of Jesus Christ. Their personalities, you see, were not destroyed. They were enhanced by the presence of Christ.

When Jesus Christ comes into your life, he doesn't come to destroy your personality. He does destroy your ego, and it's good for it to go-that independent self that seeks always to be the center of the stage. He will wage relentless, unending war against that, and the weapon he uses is the cross, those hardships and trials and humiliating experiences which he brings you through, and subsequently brings that ego to an end. He puts it where God put it-on the cross, in the place of death. He does not destroy the essential man; he indwells it, he enhances it, he glorifies it. The result is true manhood, true womanhood, attractive and beautiful and easy to live with. Man, as God intended man to be become, manifest in the world. That is incarnation!

Now here are two men who with the apostle Paul and many, many others have learned to surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ. *“Make me a captive Lord, and then I shall be free. Force me to render up my sword And I shall conqueror be. "*

This is the Christian outlook.

**Prayer:** *Lord, as we read of these two men we are reminded again of that spirit of holy recklessness, willing to risk all for the advancement of thy work and cause. Lord, we see the need for such a spirit today. We know it doesn't come by any work of our own, or a passionate flinging away of ourselves in some cause of our own making, but rather by that quiet dependence upon you, and a readiness in little things to be expendable for your sake. Teach us that, Lord, burn this message upon our minds and hearts. As it is written: "You are not your own, you are bought with a price." Help us to live in the remembrance, the continual daily experience of that. We pray in His name. Amen*