

The sermon

Intro

About 20 years ago I had the opportunity to do a pastoral internship. The pastor gave me the opportunity to preach through the book of Philippians on Sunday nights. I remember basically skipping over this morning's passage with a few comments. It was just a bunch of correspondence that wasn't particularly relevant. So I thought.

Yeah, crazy that after completing my seminary courses that was my attitude towards the Bible. We do grow! Knowing what I know now, there's an abundance of biblical spirituality contained in Paul's correspondence.

Let's turn to Paul for guidance in doing the Christian life.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Passage Focus

In these verses, Paul discusses his plans and his motivations while repeating the central themes of the letter.

Point 1: Timothy has his interests in order (2:19-22).

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. – 2:19

Timothy is with Paul in Rome. Paul plans to send Timothy to visit the Philippians in person to see where they're at. A trip of approximately 700 miles by land, 900 miles by sea. Have they responded to Paul's instruction? Are they standing firm? Has the grumbling and disputing subsided?

Paul expects to get a good report that will cheer his heart. Philippians, I'm confident you'll respond well to my challenging words. **Note that Paul found joy in healthy churches that followed God's word.**

Paul's sending Timothy "*in the Lord*" meaning in the service of Jesus, in submission to Jesus' purposes.

For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ *They all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.* – 2:20-21

Paul's only selfless co-worker in Rome is Timothy. The rest "*seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.*" "*They*" would be preachers in Rome. Those who "*preach Christ from envy and rivalry*" (1:15). Those who "*proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition*" to "*afflict me [Paul] in my imprisonment*" (1:17). Paul is surrounded by a bunch of self-seeking preachers. Men who don't care about the welfare of their hearers. Crazy I know. How did they rise to leadership? It's a question that puzzles me. **Paul has no problem judging their motives!**

But Timothy is different. He's a man who's genuinely concerned for the welfare of others. The word "**concerned**" is translated anxious elsewhere.

Jesus uses the word six times in **Matthew 6:25-34** where he says things like "*do not be **anxious** about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on.*" – 6:25

Paul uses the same word in **Philippians 4:6**:

*"do not be **anxious** about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."*

Like we might be concerned about inflation or the cost of equipment repair or our health, Timothy was concerned about the spiritual well-being of the Philippians. Not to say that he didn't care about their health or provision too.

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

I'm not telling you things you don't already know. They know "*Timothy's proven worth*" because Timothy was with Paul when the Philippian church was founded (49 AD; Acts 16:1-15) and when Paul went through Philippi about seven years later (56 AD; Acts 20:1-6). It's around 62 AD so there's a long-standing relationship between Timothy and the Philippians.

Timothy's faithfully labored with Paul for some time. He's proven.

Application

Philippians, I'm sending you a man who **has his interests in order**. Follow his example.

We can follow Timothy's example of looking out for the welfare of others because God is at work in us, "*both to will and to work his good pleasure*" (2:13).

Point 2: Paul plans with God in mind (2:23-24).

I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also. – 2:23-24

Paul intends to send Timothy, but first he wants to know how his trial is going to turn out. He's uncertain about the outcome, but he's optimistic. He thinks he'll be able to visit them.

Paul was uncertain, but he still made plans. He didn't know what God's will was, but that didn't paralyze him. When I speak of God's will here I'm speaking of God's **hidden will**. New Testament writers believed that in one sense everything that ever happens is God's will. In **Ephesians 1:11**, Paul spoke of God "*who works all things according to the counsel of his will.*" God didn't wind up the world and let it go wherever it may. No, he's actively involved. He's directing history. He's directing our church. He's directing our lives. That's why you believe things like "*that for those who love God all things work together for good*" (**Rom 8:28**).

Whether or not God wants Paul to go to Philippi is unknown to Paul. God hasn't given Paul a dream or a vision. And Paul doesn't have a Bible verse about when he should and shouldn't go to Philippi. So he he's uncertain. Some things we know because the Bible tells us. Don't lie. Don't steal. Love your neighbor as yourself. We're certain about these things because God revealed them to us. We call this God's **revealed, or moral will**.

In other areas we have freedom to plan and choose, but we make those plans in line with God's revealed will (wisdom) while submitting our plans to God's hidden will. Elsewhere Paul says to the Corinthians "*But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills*" (**1 Cor 4:19**). "*For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend time with you, if the Lord permits*" (**1 Cor 16:7**).

Yeah, I've given these matters some thought because of bizarre, wacky, unbiblical spirituality that people have pushed on me in the past.

Paul's example

- 1) Paul has desires.
- 2) These desires are shaped by kingdom values.
- 3) Paul makes plans.
- 4) These plans are shaped by kingdom values.

5) Paul submits these desires and plans to God's will.

He's okay if God interrupts his plans!

6) Uncertainty about God's will in these matters doesn't stop Paul from planning.

Application

- 1) We should be cautious about thinking we know God's hidden will.
- 2) We should examine ourselves to see if our desires and plans are shaped by kingdom values (moral will).
- 3) We should act responsibly.
- 4) We should make room for God's interruption.
- 5) We should trust God is wisely directing our lives.

That's biblical spirituality.

Point 3: God's miraculous mercy on Epaphroditus (2:25-27).

I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, ²⁶ for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. – 2:25-26

Epaphroditus was with Paul in Rome. And Paul's sending him back to Philippi. Why was Epaphroditus with Paul? Because the Philippians had sent him to Paul.

I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. – Philippians 4:18

Epaphroditus was entrusted by the church to deliver gifts from them to Paul. As a prisoner, Paul needed outside provision. Roman prisons weren't like American prisons.

Prisoners were only fed enough for bare survival. If clothing wore out, replacements weren't likely to be provided. If prisoners were wounded or sick they died. Whatever the exact gifts (maybe parchments and writing material?), they enabled Paul to keep going. He was deeply indebted to their ongoing partnership.

During the journey Epaphroditus became deeply ill. Word reached the Philippians and they were distressed. The scenario is something like:

- 1) Epaphroditus become ill during the journey.
- 2) One of his traveling companions returns to Philippi with the news.

Gifts were carried by more than one person to ensure integrity.

- 3) Epaphroditus knew his illness would grieve them.

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. – 2:27

The illness was severe. Death was certain. But God intervened. That's miraculous healing by the hand of God.

Epaphroditus successfully completed the mission because God miraculously healed him. And Epaphroditus successfully made it back to Philippi. We know this because the Philippians got the letter.

Application

A few thoughts on God and healing.

1) God's merciful.

Healing a person who would otherwise die is an act of mercy which reflects God's nature. God is merciful to those who suffer and turn to him.

The gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news of salvation from sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus, is the good news of God's mercy to sinners. Jesus died on the cross so that whoever believes can be forgiven of their sins.

We deserve judgment because of our sins. In Jesus, God offers mercy to all. How do we respond to this merciful God? Faith and repentance. That's turning from sin to trust in Jesus' death and resurrection.

God is merciful no matter the sin. Because Jesus' death is a sacrifice worthy to cover any wrong we've ever done or ever will do. If you're getting Paul's gist, God cares how his forgiven people live. God saves us to change us.

2) God heals.

God hasn't changed. He still heals. Some of you know this very well. How was Epaphroditus healed? We don't know. Likely through one with the gift of healing or in answer to prayer.

I don't know any with the gift of healing among us, but we can pray. God still heals. So ask him to do the impossible because he's able and he's merciful.

3) Why does God heal some and not all?

That's hidden from us. Not for us to know. So we pray with both expectation and submission to God's will.

Point 4: Paul the man of sorrows (2:27).

lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

If Epaphroditus had died, Paul's sorrow would have multiplied. What sorrow? The sorrow of imprisonment. The sorrow of potential execution hanging over his head. The sorrow of preachers in Rome who preached from selfish ambition, envy of Paul, and rivalry with Paul. The sorrow of infighting in the Philippian church.

Application

My point? Paul grieved. He wasn't untouched by sin and suffering. He didn't put on a plastic smile. He didn't bury himself in his work. Paul was a feeling man.

Another thought. **A sorrowful life doesn't mean a joyless life.** Joy and sorrow can co-exist. Joy isn't conditioned by circumstances.

Paul rejoiced in Jesus. Paul rejoiced in opportunity to honor Jesus. Even when sorrow abounds. That's biblical spirituality.

Point 5: Paul's anxiety for the church (2:28).

I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. – 2:28

Paul sent Epaphroditus because he wanted the Philippians to rejoice because the brother they thought was a goner was healed by God. Paul also wants to reduce his own anxiety.

What? Paul is anxious? Didn't Jesus condemn anxiety? Well, it depends on the nature of the anxiety. In the Bible, anxiety can be good or bad. It's bad to worry about whether or not God will provide. It's bad to hoard and try to make life so secure that we'd never have to trust God. But it's good to have Timothy's concern for the welfare of others. Was it wrong for the Philippians to be anxious about Epaphroditus' illness? Is it wrong for you to be anxious about a suffering loved one? No. It's biblical to be concerned about the welfare of those we love. It's biblical to feel emotion.

Paul's anxiety

So what was Paul anxious about? He's anxious that the Philippians aren't standing firm and that they're still divided.

Paul was frequently anxious about the health of churches. In **2 Corinthians 11**, Paul recounted numerous sufferings. Imprisonments, beatings, stonings, shipwrecks, hunger and thirst, cold and exposure. Paul concluded the list saying, "*And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.*"

What about the churches made Paul anxious? Things he wrote against like infighting, flagrant immorality, following after false teachers, some in the community abandoning the faith.

Paul's anxious over the spiritual health of churches. Same with me. I'm anxious about false teachers on the internet and television, you being bullied by the pressure of public opinion, how we're interacting with one another, your marriages, your homes, and a host of other things.

We all should be anxious for the health of Palermo Christian Church.

Point 6: Receive and honor men of proven worth (2:29-30).

So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, ³⁰ for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me. – 2:29-30

That's receive Epaphroditus well when he arrives. Yeah, Epaphroditus comes with a letter that says think well of me and honor me. A little awkward right?

What was great about Epaphroditus? He, like Jesus, put his life on the line for the interests of others (Paul) and took the posture of a servant. He had the mindset of Jesus. It was "*the work of Christ*" to serve Paul's interests with provisions.

The only commands in our passage are "*receive*" and "*honor such men.*" And imitate the character of Timothy and Epaphroditus by seeking the interests of others is implied. Timothy and Epaphroditus only lived this way because God was at work inside them (2:13).

Application

It's right to receive and honor those who do the work of Christ, whether pastors who teach or messengers who bring supplies or trustees who fix windows or fellowship committees who serve at funerals. It's all the work of Christ. It's all serving the interests of others.

Conclusion

God's mercy is good news. God saves us for community with one another. God saves us to serve the interests of the kingdom. God saves us to be spiritually healthy individuals and churches. God helps us to do what he commands by changing us from the inside. Praise God!

"but some men joined him and believed" (Acts 17:34). That's what Brandi Grosjean's doing.