



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Philippians 2: 19-30

2013

"Heroes"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Mark. Good morning; we are continuing our series in the Book of Philippians. We're in chapter 2 and we're going to finish up the chapter this morning. I'm going to look at verses 19 through 30,

¹⁹ But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. ²⁰ For I have no one *else* of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. ²² But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child *serv*ing his father. ²³ Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things *go* with me; ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly. ²⁵ But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; ²⁶ because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. ²⁷ For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned *about you*. ²⁹ Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high

regard; ³⁰ because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.

Philippians 2: 19-30

Well may the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study together. Let's pray.

LORD, we do thank You for this text of Scripture. Like every text of Scripture it is inspired of You and it is profitable for us. And so, LORD, as we study it this morning, we pray You'd bless it, bless us as we read it; bless our consideration of the lessons that it gives us and make application to us.

This is a time of great privilege for us, for we can gather on this day of the week, the first day of the week, the LORD's day, as Your people and open the Scriptures, read them together, consider the meaning of the text and how it applies to us. And we can do it in the power of the Spirit of God because He's within every believer in Jesus Christ. The third person of the Trinity is the seal upon our hearts: He protects us, He guides us, He teaches us—we are greatly privileged. And in this hour, He's with us, as He always is. Christ is here in the midst of this candlestick: He is with us; may we sense that and may we focus our attention clearly on this text and learn from it, be built up in the faith and be nourished by it. We commit that to You and we ask for that.

And certainly, as Mark said, this is a great privilege, in and of itself, as Your people, at this moment, here on this LORD's day, as we're gathered here together, to worship and study together, to pray together, to consider those whose names have been placed before us for prayer, and for others as well, to pray that You would bless Your people, and You'd build them up in the faith, and You'd encourage them. We pray for them.

We pray for the sick. We pray that You would give them healing. We pray that You would certainly give them encouragement in the midst of their illness. We certainly learn from our text this morning that sickness is part of the Christian life, even for those

who are serving You earnestly. They come close, even to death—and we know that they even die in Your service. That's part of life. That's part of the Christian life. It fits in Your plan. But that should, itself, be something of an encouragement to us. Should be a great encouragement to us, to know that even the hardships of life fit in Your plan, and they're part of Your good purpose for us. So, with all these things, LORD, we pray that You would encourage us and strengthen us.

But I pray particularly for those that are discouraged because of their health or because they're under strain at work, or within the home, or they're just struggling with the issues of life that happen. And I pray that You'd give them direction, that You'd give them comfort, that You'd give them a sense of Your presence, and in the case of those who are sick, we pray that You'd give them healing. In the case of those that are under pressure, we pray that You'd give them relief. We pray for those who are unemployed, that You'd give them employment. May they see Your hand of providence, as You open doors for them. We pray for all of us in so many ways.

And then we pray for those who are enjoying life, who are experiencing the pleasant things of life; who have their health, who have a job, who have friends, (and hopefully everyone in here has many friends, everyone in here is a companion of everyone), and that we have a sense of family, and that we're part of Your family. What a privilege that is to be a part of the family of God and know that we have true friendships, true brothers and sisters, and we have eternity together. And we do have eternity; You've given us that in Christ. So Father, we thank You for that.

Thank You for your Son. May we honor Him in this hour. May we honor Him in our thoughts. May we honor Him and You, our Triune God, by focusing on the things that are before us and be blessed by You. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) Couple of years ago, I read a book titled, *Hero, The Life and Legend of Lawrence of Arabia*. The title was well chosen: Lawrence was everything we think a hero to be. He was brilliant and brave, an Oxford graduate who dressed like a sheikh, led Arab tribes across burning deserts, fought battles, blew up trains. He became the greatest

celebrity of his day. Winston Churchill wrote of Lawrence, "He was indeed a dweller upon mountain tops, where the air is cold, crisp, and rarefied."

How different from the Bible's heroes. They didn't dwell on mountaintops, but in jail cells, where the air is stale. They didn't dress like an Arab prince, but in sheepskins and goatskins. Of course, we have our champions, like Joshua and David—generals and giant killers. But when we turn the page to the New Testament, it's about fishermen and slaves—not many mighty.

Not mighty in the eyes of the world, but these are the men and women that God praises and prizes. They are clothed beautifully in Christ's righteousness and they follow Him as their captain. They are humble. They serve others at personal cost. They are God's heroes, who will have eternal reward. They're the people that we should admire; they're the people that we should emulate.

That's the subject of the Book of Philippians, largely. It's certainly the subject of Philippians chapter 2, where Paul gives high praise to two men: one who was shy, and the other who was sick. But both were servants. They were the very thing Paul wanted the Philippians to be. That's what he is teaching in the book: humility that leads to service, and results in unity.

But that's difficult, isn't it? It's difficult because it goes against our nature. We don't want to serve; we want to lead—like Lawrence. So Paul gave them the example of Christ; The Son of God, who emptied Himself by becoming a servant. And the purpose of the example was to motivate the Philippians to do the same.

Now Paul mentions the two others: Timothy, whom he calls his "child", (vs23), and Epaphroditus, whom he calls his "soldier", (vs25), (and that sounds heroic). Epaphroditus was a soldier. He was a warrior—but his heroics were in his selflessness. And that's really true of both of these individuals. That was true of Timothy. It's the reason that Paul informed the Philippians that he was sending Timothy to them, because

he was concerned, (Timothy was), for the Philippians every bit as much as Paul was concerned for them; and he was concerned for that church for he wanted to know how they were doing. So he writes in verse 19, "But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition."

Now that was Paul's plan. It was a good plan, but it was a plan that was all subject to the Lord. That's what he meant by, "I hope in the Lord." (vs19). His plans were made, they were made wisely, but they weren't governed, ultimately, by Paul, they were governed by Christ, as all our plans and all of our lives are.

Providence can overrule us. We can set good plans and things happen that prevent them from happening. —That's providence and it often does that. Paul understood that; that's why he puts things the way he does, "I hope in the Lord."

But his interest was in the Philippians—and it was right for it was selfless. He cared about them and his reason for choosing Timothy was a very wise one. So he had every reason for believing that this was God's will and that God would bless his plans. 'Timothy', he says in verse 20, 'was unique of everyone with him.'

He uses an unusual word to describe him. No one, he said, had the same spirit as Timothy had. "I have no one *else* of kindred spirit." The word "*kindred spirit*" means something like '*equal soul*', and Paul meant that no one else had the sense of concern for the Philippians that he had; no one had the deep concern for them that Timothy had. That was the reason he was sending him, (and not because Timothy was the best educated person that he had, or the most knowledgeable of all his associates).

Timothy, no doubt, was a very knowledgeable person. He was a man who knew the Word of God, for he'd been trained as a young boy by his mother and grandmother in the Word of God. Paul tells us that about him, (for he was a close associate with the apostle). Paul calls him in 1 Timothy chapter 1, verse 2, his "true child in *the* faith". They were close, personally close, theologically close; they held the same doctrine, the same beliefs.

And Timothy was a teacher. Paul valued that highly. Some of the last instruction that he gave to Timothy was about instruction. He says, in 2 Timothy chapter 4,

in verse 2, "Preach the Word." That's what Paul valued; that's what Paul thought was important. And that's what ministers do: They "preach the Word." They don't have a ministry if they're not doing that, at least not the ministry that Paul commends.

Man is to preach. Preachers are to preach; they're to 'preach the Word'! They're to preach the Word by preaching it as Paul did, (which, if you'll remember when he spoke to the Ephesians elders in Acts chapter 20, he reminded them how he preached to them.) It was by preaching, 'the whole counsel of God'. (vs27). —Everything! That's what Timothy was to do. That's what all of us are to do. We're to preach the things that are easy, and the things that aren't so easy. We're to explain things. And we're to deal with doctrines that some want to hear, and others may not want to hear.

But we're to preach the whole Word of God. It's what we need. That is, I would say for the apostle Paul, a non-negotiable. It is essential. So, it is assumed here, when Timothy arrived in Philippi, he would do that: He would teach and preach the Bible and sound doctrine.

But having said all that, that's not the standard that Paul cites here for why he was sending Timothy to them. It was Timothy's affection for them. He cared for them. He cared more for them than he did for himself; and was willing to leave Paul, (his father in the faith,) in chains, in prison, in order to go east and go to minister to that little church in Philippi.

And Paul found that unique to him. No one else cared as much for the Philippians as Timothy did. He was an example of what Paul wanted the Philippians to be—caring people, people who put others ahead of themselves. Timothy was like that.

And he was unusual in that way. Paul shows just how unusual in verse 21 where he says that everyone else cared only about themselves; "They all seek after their own interests..." He didn't identify who "they all" are, but he didn't mean, 'all without exception.' [We always need to look at these words like *all* and *world* and '*all of that*' in their context. And obviously, Paul doesn't mean 'absolutely all'. 'Everyone in the world seeks his own ends and not Christ's.' He wasn't referring to everyone in the world. He's

referring to those around him—and he wasn't referring to *everyone* around him. He certainly wasn't referring to Mark, or Luke, or Titus. We can assume they were on a mission and weren't there, or if they were there, they were needed in Rome for some service.] He was referring to those who were available. He was referring to those who could have gone but didn't want to hazard the hardship of a trip east.

Travel in the ancient world was not easy. It was difficult. They didn't want to be away from home. They wanted to stay where they were comfortable. And the point he is making here is, 'It is rare to find a man like Timothy who cares more about others than he does about himself and his own comfort.'

And what that really means is, he, (Timothy), cares more about Christ and the interests of Christ, than he does for his own concerns and benefits. Timothy loved the Lord and therefore he loved the Lord's people. And Timothy's value as a servant of Paul and a servant of the Lord was well established, well known. The Philippians had seen it; they knew him. They knew what Paul calls, 'His proven worth.'

Timothy had served with Paul in Paul's ministry in his work of spreading the Gospel. It was not easy work. It was tough work. Paul had suffered imprisonment; he had suffered beatings. And Timothy was there, he had witnessed it all. Timothy had been tested; he had been approved. He'd been through things with the apostle Paul.

That's very important. Paul wasn't sending to the Philippians a novice, someone who maybe had some knowledge but no experience. He was sending a man who was seasoned in the faith, in the ministry. He was sending a man who had experience. Paul says that, "... he served with him in the furtherance of the gospel like a child *serv*ing his father." (vs22).

And I think behind that statement is the fact that in the ancient world a man would learn a trade, or his business, from his father—learn it there in the home or learn it from someone in their environment. And he would grow up, as it were, in a carpenter's shop and learn carpentry from his father or someone close—or as Paul learned the trade of tent making. And it was a process: He became familiar with the tools, first of all, and then how to use them. And he watched his father or his mentor, his

teacher, doing what was to be done and gradually picked things up in that way. And gained some experience, maybe with some easy projects, and then more difficult ones.

Well, Timothy learned the ministry in much that way. He learned the ministry at Paul's side, like a boy with his father. He listened to Paul teach; he watched Paul prepare lessons; he observed how Paul dealt with people, (and Paul dealt with people in some very difficult situations). And Timothy was there watching the apostle do all of that. And he learned from that. Then Paul then gave Timothy opportunities to minister, and Paul watched him in the churches; and he listened to Timothy's teaching; and he observed the care and concern that he showed for others. Timothy had the experience.

Now we know some things about Timothy from other texts. It seems that Paul had led him to the Lord on his first missionary journey to the cities of Derbe and Lystra. Timothy was a young man and ministry, it seems, was not easy for him. In fact, from what we know of Timothy, (and I think this is the general consensus), Timothy was a rather timid, or shy, young man.

One example of that can be 1 Corinthians 16 where Paul is giving some last instruction to the Corinthians and he tells them that if Timothy came to them, (and he was hoping to send Timothy to them), he says that those Corinthians, 'shouldn't give him anything to fear.' (vs10). That was a difficult church to deal with, and he knew the problems that they could create for anyone. But Timothy, evidently, was rather shy and timid. Paul was a seasoned warrior; Timothy was timid, so he was concerned about that. He was concerned about that aspect of him.

But that really, in a sense, undergirds what I'm saying about the heroic nature of this young man; because while he was timid, he was loyal. He loved the Lord and Paul loved Timothy. He called him his "faithful child". (1Cor 4:17). Paul could send him on missions to places to be where Paul couldn't be, to do what Paul couldn't do. And he would do that for Paul. He went and he was faithful.

It must have been a challenge for him if it's true if he was of a rather timid nature. He went, trusting in the Lord with 'fear and trembling'. He may not have felt up

to the task that Paul gave him, but he didn't resist it—he went. And that takes courage. That's a hero; that's a man who walks by faith.

And the Lord never let him down. He didn't go somewhere and feel, 'I'm not adequate for this, but I've been sent by the apostle. I'll go.' And he gets there and he says, 'The Lord wasn't there with me; I was abandoned; I fell on my face.' That never happened. The Lord was always with him—as He's always with us.

So Paul knew the young man he would send to Philippi: He was mature; he was skilled. And Paul had confidence that Timothy could deal with the problems that were there. So he told the Philippians, in verse 23, that he “hoped to send him immediately” if the situation there in Rome permitted.

And he hoped also to come himself. He says in verse 24, "...and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly." But again, that was uncertain. His “trust”, as his “hope” was “in the Lord”. It was in the Lord's hands, and really, that's the very best place for our plans to be, and for our lives to be. It's with the Lord and whatever the outcome, in that case, it's best. It may not be the outcome that we want; it may not be what we had planned for. It may be something completely different and very disappointing to us. But as we reflect upon it, if we're “in the Lord”, if we're trusting in the Lord, He knows best—and even difficulty is best for us. So, we leave these things to the Lord; and that's what Paul was doing.

Now it seems that Paul sent this letter, and the message here in the letter, with Epaphroditus, whom he mentions in verse 25. We know from chapter 4 that Epaphroditus brought the gift to Paul from Philippi. Other than that, we know nothing about him except what's written here in these six verses. But it's clear from what Paul does write that he had great admiration for him.

The church of Philippi did as well. They obviously trusted him. They were a poor church. They were one of the churches of Macedonia. And you'll remember Paul talks about those churches in 2 Corinthians chapter 8, and the deep poverty from which they gave to help support the poor saints in Judea.

And they did the same here. They gave a gift to Paul to support him there in Rome with the little bit of money that they had, (and it must have been difficult scraping up the money that they did), and then they entrusted it to this man, Epaphroditus. You know they wouldn't entrust it to someone that they didn't have any confidence in. They had great confidence in him. They sent him to Rome to help Paul, and to stay on with the apostle and continue to minister to him, perhaps until he was able to come visit them. They had confidence in him. They trusted him. Paul calls him, "your messenger and minister to my need." (vs25b).

But something had happened; Epaphroditus had gotten seriously ill. His friends back home had learned about it. They worried for him, and Epaphroditus worried for them, because communications were not very easy in that time. Messages had to be sent in a very slow process, and he worried that they may have wondered what happened to Epaphroditus. Maybe his parents, his family, maybe he had a fiancé back in Philippi that was wondering if he was even alive. And it worried him for their sake. So Paul sent him back home.

But he sent him back with a very good report on his service. He hadn't failed in his service. He'd been sent there to minister to Paul. Now he's back; and it wasn't because he failed. In fact, he'd almost made the ultimate sacrifice for the apostle in his service. In verse 27, Paul says, "...he was sick to the point of death."

Now that was selfless service; so Epaphroditus didn't return a failure, but a hero. He had served Paul completely and Paul writes highly of him. In verse 25, he calls him "my brother", his "worker", and his "soldier." It's hard to imagine higher words of praise coming from the apostle Paul than those words. Epaphroditus was his brother, which meant they were one in the faith. They were together in the family of God, and they were together as equals in the family of God. Paul wasn't his master—Paul was his brother. It's a term of equality; it's a term of affection and warmth. Paul may have been his big brother, but he was still his brother. They were equal in the faith, equally loved by the Lord, equally valuable to the Lord.

And Epaphroditus was Paul's "fellow worker." They were partners. Brothers don't always do things together; they don't always labor together. They may not labor together at all—but partners do. That's what they're partners in; their labors, their work. And Paul and Epaphroditus labored in Gospel work together.

Maybe Epaphroditus was there in the prison with Paul when he spoke to the Roman guard and gave the Gospel. And Epaphroditus was there at his side; and maybe Epaphroditus was able to give his own testimony of how he was brought to a saving knowledge of Christ. It would have been different from Paul's. And maybe that was in part the value of it because who's had a conversion like Paul?! It was clearly a miraculous conversion there on the Damascus road and a Roman guard may not be able to quite identify with that.

But then Epaphroditus gives a very simple explanation of how he was brought to saving knowledge of Christ, "I heard the Gospel just like you're hearing the Gospel now", he might have told that Roman guard, "and God opened my heart. Things changed." And so he was able to serve with Paul and give support to him in that way. I'm speculating, but it seems very reasonable that he did that.

Or he may have sat there in that prison cell with the apostle while he was speaking and teaching, and prayed for his ministry, and prayed earnestly for him, supporting him in that way.

And then he would do whatever was necessary to help Paul in the material needs of his life. He'd go where Paul needed him to go. He'd visit the places Paul needed him to visit. He did whatever he could to help in the progress of the Gospel. Whatever he did, he did with Paul: He did with him either there or he did what he could at his instruction. The apostle speaks of him in this way, he's "my brother." He's his "fellow worker."

And that's the way ministry took place with the apostle: Paul did not minister alone; he didn't minister solo—the Lord Jesus didn't design the ministry to be done in that way. He sent, you'll remember, his disciples out two by two; He put them in pairs.

And Paul is always seen ministering with others. There are some rare occasions when he's by himself. He was alone in Athens and went on to Corinth by himself. But generally he's with people. He's with other believers, ministering together with them. Which is the Lord's design for ministry and the Christian life.

We need each other. We need the mutual encouragement we can give; the counsel and direction that we can give; the correction that we can give one another. We need that because the ministry can be difficult.

And when I say that, I say 'the ministry', in the narrow sense, of someone standing in a pulpit as I am, or someone on a Wednesday night at a lectern, or in a Sunday School classroom, teaching, or going out evangelizing.

And yet I also mean it in the broadest sense, because the Christian life is ministry. You may be a businessman, you may be a schoolteacher, wherever—you have a witness where you are. It may be that you have a colleague who's sick, and sick unto death, and will leave this world eventually and they're not saved. They don't know Christ. And it's your privilege to give the Gospel. It's your privilege to be a minister there.

You're here on Sunday morning hopefully being built up in the faith and being equipped to go out and be a witness, because your life is a ministry. We're all in the ministry in one sense or another. And the ministry can be difficult. The Christian life is difficult. It can be described as labor—as hard work.

It's also war. And that's clear from the third description: He calls Epaphroditus his "fellow soldier." They were not only building, they were fighting, struggling with enemies, spiritually.

That's Ephesians 6 and Paul's description of the invisible war that is raging all around us. The 'fiery darts' and the 'spiritual powers' that are against us is a reminder that this world is not simply material.

That's the dominant world view today: naturalism and materialism...and we can begin to think in those terms. That's the problem with "being conformed to this age", (Rom 12:2), and the thinking of this world.

But the Bible is very clear; and the apostle Paul is very clear: There is another dimension to existence that you don't see and you don't feel, but is every bit as big and every bit as real as the material and the visible, and that's the spiritual. He wrote about that in Ephesians 6.

And he wrote about it in other places. He told the Corinthians, "Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh., for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses." (2Cor 10:3-4). What fortresses? Material fortresses, great walls of stone and brick? No. "*We are* bringing down speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God." (ibid. vs5). That's the immaterial; that's the intellectual; that's the spiritual; that's where we fight. That's where the war is taking place. In other words, we are in a fight. We are warriors every bit as much as Joshua was or T. E. Lawrence was. —Only our enemy is invisible. Our enemy is spiritual.

The conflict, though, can get physical. Paul was stoned and beaten many times. He was in chains when he was writing this letter to the Philippians. The history of the church is full of examples of people suffering for the faith.

One of the prominent preachers of 'The Great Awakening', (the 18th century revival we associate with Whitfield and the Weasleys), was a Welshman named Howell Harris. He was described as fearless and tireless in his evangelistic service for the Lord. He needed to be tireless and fearless because he took a lot of abuse. He preached in an age that was not congenial for the Gospel. In fact, there was a lot of implacable opposition to the Gospel in those days. On one occasion a mob that was liquored up attacked him. They smeared him with mud, and they beat him with their fists and clubs. His biographer wrote that "His path could be marked in the street by the crimson stains of his blood."

That was Paul's experience. He wrote that he was beaten many "times without number." (2Cor 11:23). You can see why it was providential that Paul had Luke with him.

Paul called Luke, "the beloved physician." (Col 4:14). And there must have been many times when Dr. Luke patched up Paul's broken body.

Well, most of us don't experience anything like that; few people have. But the spiritual war is material and physical for all of us. And Epaphroditus was in it all with the apostle Paul, spiritually and physically—materially as well as spiritually.

But now, Epaphroditus was back home, back in Philippi, delivering Paul's letter to the church. And some there may have wondered why he was there. He'd been sent to Rome to minister to the apostle. I assume he'd been sent there to take care of him until his trial, and hopefully his release—and maybe accompany him back to Philippi. That was the mission he had been given—and there may have been some there who were wondering if he had abandoned his mission. They'd gotten word that Epaphroditus was sick, but maybe they didn't know how serious his illness was. And the fact that he was back there shows, obviously, he had recovered. So since he'd recovered, why did he come back? Why didn't he stay there?

So Paul, anticipating all of this, in verse 26 writes to explain his return. It's not that Epaphroditus had lost courage or that he had deserted Paul. Not at all. Paul sets the record straight: Epaphroditus was 'his brother', was 'his worker', was 'his fellow soldier' in the faith who had become gravely ill while serving with him, so ill that he'd almost died. But, he says, "God had mercy on him". And not only did God have mercy on Epaphroditus, but Paul says, 'He had mercy on Paul himself', saying that he would have had "sorrow upon sorrow" if Epaphroditus had died. (vs27). Which is a way of saying that Paul loved him—loved Epaphroditus and that he was no coward.

Paul doesn't suggest what the sickness was that Epaphroditus suffered or how he got it. Malaria was a problem in ancient Rome; maybe it was that. Or he could have contracted all kinds of germs while visiting the sick. (Back in Calvin's Geneva, lots of young ministers died from the plague while visiting the sick.) The Lord doesn't heal everyone; that's one thing you learn from something like this if you reflect upon it.

It's true, the Lord just doesn't heal everyone. Some people get sick in the ministry. Sometimes, oftentimes, they get ill, they get sick. And that happened to Epaphroditus; somehow he came down with that illness. The young ministers I mentioned in Geneva did. Many of them died; they're like soldiers on the battlefield. That's very much what the ministry is like.

It was for Epaphroditus; yet Epaphroditus was spared. Not all are spared, but Epaphroditus was. God was merciful to him—and to Paul. But his illness shows that sickness happens. It happens to God's people. It's not always due to sin. Very often it's not due to some personal sin. It's what happens in the ministry. It's always part of God's plan. I can't tell you how—but we can know that it is.

We know that by faith: People get sick, people suffer, they die for the Gospel but they die in God's will. That's encouraging, isn't it? It's difficult to go through experiences like that, but it is encouraging to know that it fits within God's plan and purpose for His church and for His people, for us individually.

Epaphroditus suffered while doing God's will. He's another example here of selfless service: He served to the point of death, at least to the point of being willing to die. He didn't quit. Paul repeats in verse 28, "I sent him". 'He didn't abandon me, I told him to go back to Philippi. I sent him on that mission.' And he did that as much for them as he did for Epaphroditus. He says, "I have sent him...so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you." (vs28).

Now that, too, was selfless; Paul himself is an example of selflessness. He needed Epaphroditus. But he worried about the Philippians; he was worried for them. And so he sent Epaphroditus back. He also needed Timothy, but he was going to send Timothy to them as well. Paul practiced what he preached—what he preached in verse 4, where he said that 'We are not to look out for our own personal interest, but the interest of others.' And that's exactly what Paul was doing: He wasn't looking out for himself; he was thinking of the welfare of the Philippians—he put them first. So we have three examples here of selfless service: Timothy, and Epaphroditus, and Paul.

Epaphroditus was certainly that kind of person. So Paul concludes the passage by telling them to, 'Receive him with joy and respect and hold men like him in high regard.' (vs29). In other words, 'Give him a hero's welcome because that's what he is. He *risked* his life in the ministry.' (vs30a). And he did so, Paul says, in order to complete what was 'deficient in their service' for Paul. In other words, 'Epaphroditus was their representative, far away from home, serving in their absence, and almost dying doing it.'

Now, that refers to more than fighting an illness, whatever the illness may have been. This word, *risk*: "...risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service", is used only this one time in the New Testament. (vs30b). It's what called a '*hapax legomenon*', "used once". But a second century inscription was found near the Black Sea which used this word with the meaning, "To daringly expose oneself to danger." That's what Epaphroditus did: visiting the sick, giving the Gospel to pagans, living in very difficult conditions, until finally, his health broke or he caught a virus. He risked his life for the Gospel. That's a hero. He put his life on the line—and Paul praises him.

But all of that was a work of God's grace. In fact, not very far up the page, if you look in your Bibles in chapter 2, you have that statement that Paul made in chapter 2, verses 12 and 13, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to do according to His good pleasure." What we do, the good that we do, is the product of God's work within us. And all of that was certainly the product of God's work within him, the product of God's grace in the life of this man, Epaphroditus. That's illustrated from what he did.

That's illustrated also from his name. *Epaphroditus* means '*lovely*'. It comes from Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and fertility—and it suggests that his family was devoted to the Gospel. It suggests that he was saved out of paganism; and so he's an example of the transforming grace of God.

He may have been saved out of the worst, darkest form of paganism, "snatched like a brand from the burning" made a child of God and given a new meaning to his

name. The name itself is transformed because he truly became an example of love—love for Christ and love for the people of Christ. He served them selflessly, sacrificially, almost to death: which again makes him an example of what Paul was teaching—humble, selfless service. Epaphroditus cared less for himself than he did for Paul and the Philippians. He served them both.

The word *hero* is probably overused today. We use it of everyone from soldiers to athletes: People who fight on battlefields or charge into burning buildings certainly are heroes. But what the Bible celebrates as a hero, as a person to “hold in high regard”, is the *servant*. And I really think that is oftentimes more difficult to do than risk one's life in a fight. Now I don't diminish the courage it takes to go to war and face bullets; but humbling ourselves, being willing to take second place, putting others first, not grabbing the glory, that is God's hero.

Winning the battle over pride and self-importance is one of the greatest victories that a person can win. That's an invisible war; and it's a daily war. We don't see it, but it happens. It happens in the heart; it happens in the mind. We don't see it in one another but God sees it, sees everything. He knows everything; He knows the attitude a person has; He knows the motive that a person has; He knows why we do what we do.

You don't see that. You don't know that. But God does—and He is pleased with men and women who are selfless in their service.

Much of the Christian life happens in private, in our secret life, where we meet the Lord and our character is formed. That's the battlefield where Satan meets us; that's where he attacks us, in the mind, in the heart. And those who walk with the Lord privately, serve Him best publicly. And many of them, I believe, are people out of the public eye who serve quietly and faithfully—and more so than people in the public eye.

You can look at me every Sunday morning, and you're not going to see many flaws. I may stumble verbally every once in a while, but I'm not up here acting, (hopefully), proud and arrogant; and showing forth all the flaws and foibles of my life. When you're up in front of people, you're on guard against those things. But in private,

that's a different matter. And in the privacy of our own heart, that's a different matter. That's really where the battle is fought.

And you see it a lot in the very small things of life. Not on the mountaintops, but in the valley, in the routine of life. It's those who walk, as I say, with the Lord privately that serve best publicly, who walk with Him in the heart of their mind, and they're faithful in the small things of life, the private things of life; the things that are behind closed doors. They serve in their families, as husbands who provide at cost to themselves: cost to their time, their energy. They labor hard to support their families. They sacrifice their time to help in many ways.

They do it in the little things of life. The husband who helps his wife do the dishes. (I'm looking at my sons-in-law right now. *[Laughter]*) Those are the little things that the Lord sees.

And they're important—the small things in life. They minister in the church in the simple ways. You think this is the way to minister. (You probably don't, but some people do.) They think, "Well, if you're a minister, you're up in a pulpit." No. You're in the pew. And you're taking the time to speak to that person next to you; or in the pew in front of you. And you're risking that embarrassing moment when you say, "Well, how long have you gone to Believer's Chapel?" And they say, "20 years." And you go, "Oh" And that's embarrassing, but then why don't they know you if they've been here for 20 years? At least you're taking the initiative, and you're speaking, and you're getting to know people. Those are acts of service; and they're acts of service that we do if we do them correctly, because we love the Lord and we want to bless His people.

None of that, I know, sounds very heroic. But someday, the Lord will reward those in that service. And He'll reward their service greatly. He rewards selfless, humble service from the heart, from a motive of love for others. And so that's what Paul's commending here. That's what he's been commending throughout this letter, and that's what we need. May God give us that. May God give us humble hearts that long to serve, and through that promote the unity of the body, and the strength of the church.

But of course, first of all, He must give us life. He must give us grace, and the new birth. That's what you need if you're here without Christ. You need to be born again. You need to become a child of God. Only God can give that. But we get that by His grace. Everyone who looks to Him, everyone who trusts in Him is saved at the moment of faith; made the child of God, forgiven of his or her sins forever, and given an eternal and glorious future, and a secure present. Come to Him. Trust in Him.

And you who have, rest in Him, and serve one another selflessly. Let's pray.

Father, that's our prayer for ourselves: That You would make us into the kind of people that we see here; Timothy, Epaphroditus, Paul, men who were selfless, who were ready to give up their comforts for the good of others, willing even to die for others. We thank You for that. Thank You for their example and pray that You would build that into our lives.

We thank You for Christ because He did that—and He's the ultimate example of one who humbled Himself, who emptied Himself to become a servant in order to die for sinners. We thank You for His death for us. And it's in His name we pray. Amen.

(End of Audio)