

Servants of Christ

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- [0 : 0 0] Gracious God, please help us as we seek to understand your word this morning. Please be at work by your Holy Spirit to transform us into the likeness of your Son.
- And please drive us to faith and obedience. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Friends, I thought I'd like to start by reminding you a little bit about Australian history.
- Although, of course, Indigenous Australians have been in Australia for thousands of years, white people have only lived here for slightly over 200.
- That means we have not much history. And those of you who have visited other parts of the world know that we're quite bereft of history in terms of white people in Australia.
- And one particular piece of history, though, that we look back on is one that we've remembered this last week. That history happened during the First World War.
- [1 : 0 2] The young Australian men came to fight beside the British during the war. Many of those men were aged in their late teens. Some had lied about how old they were. They were young.
- They were inexperienced in war. And one of the most famous battles, of course, that they fought was Gallipoli. The Australian troops fought on the shores of Gallipoli. And they were commanded by British commanders who were in ships removed from the actual fighting.
- Nevertheless, they fought like heroes. You all know this, of course. They died in their thousands. Anyway, a number of years ago, I read an article about a book written about this particular battle.
- And it was either the writer or the reviewer, I can't remember to this day, but he made a comment that has stuck in my mind ever since about this battle. Summing up the politics and the heroics of the battle, he recorded that the troops fought like lions but were commanded by donkeys.
- And many people have since affirmed that that was the case. And these young lions have become part and parcel of the Australian psyche, haven't they?
- [2 : 1 1] You see, in Australia, these men epitomise what we think we are and what we think we should be like. They are our heroes. They're the ones that we honour.
- We give them a day. And others like them who've died in battle since. Today, I want us to think about who it is that we Christians honour like this. That is, who are the ones that we so hold up that we seek to emulate?
- Who are the men and the women who are the models for us of what it means to live for and serve Christ Jesus? I buried a saint this week who is perhaps one model.
- But there are many others, aren't there? But I want us to ask that question. I want us to ask ourselves, who are the people we should honour? What do they look like? How do they act?
- What is it that we see in them that epitomises Christian faith and Christian discipleship? Why is it that we honour them and why should we honour them?

[3 : 13] In my view, that, I think, is the theme of this passage we're going to look at today. I want you to open your Bibles to Philippians chapter 2 and verse 19, where Paul, and verse 29 as well, where Paul explicitly talks about the men he thinks that the Philippians should honour.

He tells the Philippians about these men. And as he does, I think that he is telling them about the sort of Christians he wants them to emulate and therefore us to emulate as well.

So let's take a look at the passage. Let's take a look at these particularly two men that Paul wants to highlight for us. Let's examine their makeup and let's model our lives upon them.

Now, my bet is that if you read Philippians chapter 2, 5 to 11, if I read it out, Philippians 2, 5 to 11 to you, many of you would hear the language of Philippians 2 and you would know parts of it almost off by heart, perhaps, but certainly you would recognise them.

My bet is that this is the same if I read Philippians 3 to you, but sandwiched in between Philippians 2, 5 to 11 and Philippians 3 are these verses we're looking at today.

[4 : 24] And not many of us will remember the verses that are set today. They won't ring many bells for us. At first read, they seem to be just a set of travel plans from Paul and therefore relatively unimportant.

Verses 19 to 24, he tells us about, tells the Philippians that he hopes to send Timothy and then 25 to 30, he tells us about Epaphroditus.

Now, my view, however, is that these verses are not just throw away things. They're integral to the whole argument that Paul has been engaged in up until now, and they will be integral to his argument that follows.

Let me explain how this works. Let me, let us go back to chapter 1. And you might remember that we noticed that in chapter 1, Paul is very concerned about the gospel and its progress, its proclamation. You might also remember that Paul wanted the Philippians to be equally concerned about the gospel and its progress and its proclamation.

Philippians chapter 1, verse 27, has Paul telling us that he wants the Philippians to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of this gospel. He's provided the model of himself.

[5 : 33] In chapter 1, he showed what it means to stand firm for Christ in the midst of persecution. He also showed us how he dealt with relational problems in such a way that the gospel was able to progress.

In chapter 2, he put before us the model of Jesus Christ. Then in chapter 2, he also showed us how grumbling and complaining can take the witness of God's people.

You see, my view is that while Paul wanted to talk about his travel plans in the verses we're looking at today, and his plans also for Timothy and Epaphroditus, that's not his main aim here.

He wants to accomplish something else. His main aim here is to use Timothy and Epaphroditus as models for what it means to be disciples of the Lord Jesus. Just like Paul and just like Jesus, Timothy and Epaphroditus are examples of godly conduct.

They're models of what it means to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. So let's have a look together at what Paul says about each of these men, and I'm just going to summarize. Let's turn to Timothy, verses 19 to 24.

[6 : 41] Now, the New Testament tells us a fair bit about Timothy. Timothy, we know from Acts 16 and from 2 Timothy 1, that Timothy came from a place called Lystra. His father was a Greek, was Greek, and his mother was a Jew.

We also know that Paul had a special affection for this man, Timothy. We're told that Timothy witnessed Paul's suffering. That's in 2 Timothy 3. He accompanied Paul on some of his missionary journeys, and it also appears from the New Testament evidence that Timothy was, well, quite a timid man.

And not always given to the respect that Paul thought ought to be his. However, Timothy and Paul had a very deep personal relationship, a friendship.

They had been partners in the gospel and were partners in the gospel. And no other person among Paul's companions is so warmly commended by Paul throughout the epistles for his loyalty.

And that's the Timothy that Paul is speaking about here. And in verse 19, he tells us that he hopes to send this Timothy to his beloved Philippians. Normally, when Paul sends someone to a congregation, it's not necessarily for positive reasons.

[7 : 54] That is, it might be to straighten them out. Not in this case. In this case, Paul is sending Timothy for his own sake. Now, the Philippians, you see, they knew Timothy quite well.

Nevertheless, Paul outlines to them what they probably already knew, that is, Timothy's commendable attributes. And I want us to concentrate on those attributes and see what they are.

I want us to note very carefully what it is that Paul finds commendable in this man, Timothy. First thing to note is that Paul commends his genuine interest in their welfare.

Look at verse 20. I have no one else like him who will show genuine concern for your welfare. The word literally means no one of like mind or of like soul.

In other words, you see, Paul has no one just like Timothy, no one who has sort of got the same mindset as this man. No one whose mind is like Paul in taking a genuine interest in the welfare of the Philippians.

[9 : 01] I wonder if you can see what is going on here. You see, he's saying that Timothy is the sort of person that Paul told the Philippians they should be like back in verse 4 of this same chapter. Timothy, you see, is a living example of someone who doesn't look out for their own interests, but also looks out, if not more so looks out for the interests of others.

Second thing comes in verse 21. Have a look at it there. Paul says, for everyone else looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. You see, Paul's very clear, isn't he?

Timothy's focus is on the interests of others. Now, remember back in chapter 1, Paul told us that for he, Paul, to live was Christ.

Earlier in this chapter, Paul has told us, told the Philippians that they were to focus on the interests of others, just as Christ humbled himself in being obedient to God to the point of death. Paul is telling the Philippians that Timothy is like Paul and that he is like Jesus.

He's focused on the right things, focused on Jesus for him to live. Paul is saying is Christ and therefore focused on the people of God.

[10 : 18] And then he moves on to a third commendable thing about Timothy and look at it in verse 22. Paul says, but you know that Timothy has proved himself because as a son with his father, he served with me in the work of the gospel.

Now, in Paul's day, as in nearly every generation until the last perhaps 100 years or even less, if you're a young man and dad was a carpenter, your task in life would be to be a carpenter.

If dad was a blacksmith, you would be a blacksmith. And from very early on in your age, you would work beside your father. You would watch him do it.

I once saw this in a glassblowing company just south of in Margaret River, south of Perth. And it was school holidays.

And this glassblower was there showing everyone how to blow exquisite glass constructions. And then his son appeared.

[11 : 23] And they worked side by side. And it was just wonderful to watch. There was dad just teaching his son. And the son was doing smaller projects. And those works were then being sold.

He was teaching his son. It was an apprentice model, wasn't it? And you see, Paul is saying that Timothy can be commended because of his slavery in the work of the gospel. And Timothy is, as it were, Paul's apprentice son.

He exhibits the mind of his father. He exhibits the concerns of his father. He exhibits the gifts and attitudes of his father in this, as it were, trade.

As his father has been a slave in the work of the gospel, so has the son been. Timothy, you see, is an ideal son, an ideal man, a man to emulate. This is the man Paul hopes to send in his place until he comes.

He hopes that when he gets there, he'll do as his dad, as it were, in the faith has done with the Philippians. That's what he says. That's what is being said in these verses. But let's now turn to Epaphroditus 25 to 30.

[12 : 26] Now, this fellow Epaphroditus is a Macedonian Christian. He comes from Philippi. In verse 25, he's called a messenger. That probably means he was responsible for bringing to Paul a message and a gift.

The Philippians were very generous people, as we've heard earlier on. And so Epaphroditus probably brought a message and a gift to Paul. He was also a gift in himself. As the Philippians had sent him to look after Paul's needs in prison, not just to give him money and care, but to also give him care.

However, these verses indicate that things didn't quite go as was planned. Apparently, when Epaphroditus visited Paul, he became so seriously ill that he nearly died.

And that's what Paul says in verse 27. However, verse 27 says God spared him. He had mercy on Epaphroditus and also on Paul, who was being helped, sparing him sorrow upon sorrow.

But now look at verse 30. Paul tells us that in order to fulfill the desires of his fellow Philippians, Epaphroditus put his own life at risk.

[13 : 34] It appears that now Paul has decided that he'll send Epaphroditus back with a letter and then send Timothy as soon as he knows the result of his imprisonment. So can you see Paul's care for his congregation here?

You see, it's not his own interests that are important. It's the interests of his congregation, his church. So let's take a closer look, though, at these verses. You see, just as he did with Timothy, Paul takes time out to describe some commendable attributes of Epaphroditus.

So let's have a look at them. First thing Paul commends is the willingness of Epaphroditus to die for the work of Christ. In other words, you see, Epaphroditus is committed to the work of the gospel, committed to gospel work.

And the gospel work he's committed to finds its shape in caring for Paul, the gospel preacher, the apostle. And he's so committed to that task that he's even willing to die for his care of Paul.

That's what verse 30 makes clear. Epaphroditus almost died for the work of Christ, risked his life for it. Now, second thing, just as Jesus and Paul and Timothy place the interests of others first, so does Epaphroditus.

[14 : 47] Can you see it? He's a model of service. He risks his life in serving Paul and the Philippians. That's clear in verse 25 and clear in 30. So, friends, there is Timothy and Epaphroditus.

They're people, Paul says, we should honour. They're people, you see, that we should emulate. However, in telling us about Timothy and Epaphroditus, he models some of the things that he observes in them.

And that's what we've just looked at. In sending Timothy and Epaphroditus, Paul has, as it were, led us into his own mind. And we see that he, too, is willing to sacrifice for others.

You see, Paul is willing to send his spiritual son, Timothy, for the sake of his congregation. And he's willing to forego his own comfort and send Epaphroditus back to the Philippians so that Epaphroditus might be comforted and the Philippians comforted.

Can you see the selflessness of these people, whether it's Paul or Epaphroditus or Timothy? They're all of like mind, aren't they?

[15 : 51] All giving out for others. It's a grand passage in many ways, isn't it? These models of godly men. In these few short verses, Paul has led us into the mind and led us into the lives of great Christian people.

Having told us about Timothy and Epaphroditus and told us to honour them, he's told us why we should honour them. We should honour them because they're examples of worthy conduct. Verse 27.

They're examples of worthy conduct because they demonstrate a willingness to serve Christ, often in great difficulty. A devotion to the interests of others first, often at personal cost.

And a commitment to slavery, to the work of Christ in the gospel, in a world that regards slaves as being at the bottom of the pile. They're models of what it means to love and serve Jesus.

Timothy's a model of serving the gospel by caring for the needs of others above his own. Epaphroditus is a model of suffering that often comes with the ministry of the gospel. And Paul is a model of the selflessness that is at the core of God's act in Christ.

[16 : 56] But I want to leave the first century for a moment. I've travelled through history to a very different era. The year is 1536. And the man we're going to look at is a 27-year-old man.

You know, he's one of my heroes in the faith, a man called John Calvin. He's a man in poor health. Actually, Calvin was a chronic insomniac, which may...

And he could only sleep a couple of hours a night, which may describe how he managed to get so many things written. But also, let me tell you a bit about his general state of health.

He suffered from severe migraines, asthma, catarrh, hemorrhoids, intermittent fevers, and arthritis of an almost unbearably painful type.

In 1536, the young John Calvin had published one of the greatest works of the Reformation, a work called the Institutes of the Christian Religion. And soon after, he found himself passing through the city of Geneva on his way back to Basel.

[17 : 59] And a Protestant leader of the time, based in Geneva, a certain Guglielmo Farrell, found out he was there and approached him.

I can sort of, in my mind, almost imagine him knocking at the door. And he urged him to help reform the city of Geneva. And Calvin urged back with these words, Be kind to me.

Let me serve God in some other way. You see, Calvin wanted to continue his studies. He wanted the scholar's life, you know, the life of the academic, not the wild hurly-burly of Geneva.

And it's at that point that Farrell thundered back at Calvin and said, I declare to you, in the name of God Almighty, your studies are an excuse. If you don't now give yourself to this work with us, God will curse you.

For then you'll be seeking yourself, not Christ. What would you do at this point? Well, Calvin trembled before God. And later on in his life, he wrote these words.

[19 : 03] I was transfixed. Not only by being addressed and warned this way, but also by a terrible force swearing by Farrell, as if God from heaven violently grabbed me with his hand.

And so it was that in godly humility, John Calvin yielded. And he moved to the ungodly Geneva, and he started ministry there. It was a ministry that often taxed him, and was associated with worsening health, and difficult persecution.

But it was a life of service that has left an indelible mark on Christian faith throughout the world. You see, Calvin, you see, I think, had grasped what Timothy and Epaphroditus had grasped.

Calvin grasped that a life that is worth living is a life of service and humble obedience for Christ, to Christ. It is often a life of suffering, but it's a life also full of the blessing of God.

And it's the only life worth living. So I want to go back to where we started today. We started off by asking, who are the people that we should honour? We've found such people in this passage, haven't we?

[20 : 14] Timothy, Epaphroditus, Paul himself. These are sorts of people we should honour. We should honour people like John Calvin, and many, many others through Christian history, who have caught the same thing, and done the same thing.

However, the main thrust of this passage is not so much on this, but it's on godly, gospel-centred conduct.

It's not so much on the people, it's on what they did, and how they did it. You see, Paul doesn't simply want the Philippians to honour such men. You see, he knows these men built their lives on the example of Christ, such as he has explained earlier on in this chapter.

And that's the very thing he wants the Philippians to do. He wants them to be conformed to the likeness of Christ. And as he puts it in verse 5, he wants them to have the same attitude that Jesus himself had.

And that is what God wants of us as we read this passage. You see, these men are put here as concrete examples of what it looks like to have that attitude, that of Christ Jesus.

[21 : 29] And God wants us to honour such men by emulating them. He wants us, you see, to take up the way of the cross, that is the way of humility. And these are the sorts of people that we are to be.

We're to be just like this. Whether it be in our family lives, in our marriages, in our congregational life, or in the lives of the workplace and the broader world.

Let me just, if I can, show you one place where, you know, we could put it, where many of you have already put it into practice in our congregational life. Let me think for a moment just of something we've done in these last few weeks.

That is the service changes we've been reviewing. And many of you filled out forms about it. And I know many of you have thought in the sort of mindset that is here. But I want you to think just for a moment about how you individually thought when you filled out the forms for feedback about our changes in times.

Now, we were seeking your feelings in this and as you gave your feedback, I want you to think who was at the centre of your thoughts and feelings as you responded?

[22 : 40] Who was at the centre of your thoughts and feelings as you responded? Was it you? Or was it others? I just do this for no other reason but to give us just a little litmus test of, you know, how our thinking often functions.

You see, I think it's at these times and every other time that our dispositions will come to the fore.

And the dispositions of Christian people is that we are to have the dispositions of Christ. That is, we are to think of others before ourselves first.

And I think it's a very interesting just litmus test for us. You see, we're to be like the Lord Jesus. And not just then but in every aspect of our existence.

So as we go out this morning, as we talk to people, as we help people, and I know as a congregation there are so many people that have caught on with this, that seek to be like the Lord Jesus.

[23 : 45] And it is a great thing, something I am very glad for, that we have many Timothys and Epaphroditus amongst us. But that is what we are meant to be even more so.

We are to be people who take a genuine interest in the welfare of others. We are to have their interests higher than our own. And that's not to be just a duty, simple duty enacted every now and then.

It is to be our overwhelming, heartfelt, and natural disposition. The thing that makes us tick must be the focus on others and their interests. For that is where the interests of Christ himself are centred.

Aren't they? Our lives are to be lives of slavery to the interests of others as it were. We are to take risks for their interests. We are to be willing to sacrifice our own interests for theirs.

We are to die for their interests. You see, we are people who have come to know the Lord Jesus, aren't we? And we have come to know that where he is, there is fullness of joy.

[24 : 51] And doing what he is doing will be a place of fullness of joy. And what Jesus does is for our best interests.

He has his priority fixed there. We know that because he is willing to die for that. So in all matters, let us be like these men for they were like their Lord.

And they didn't look out for their own interests, but for the interests of others. And they were willing to die on the altar of the service of the best interests of their fellow Christians and the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So let's pray. Father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus who put aside his interests for ours.

We thank you for these men portrayed in Paul's epistle to the Philippians. Father, we stop just for a moment and thank you for men and women in our own lives who have been like these men, whether it be parents or those who brought us to Christ or those who have been slaves for the Lord Jesus Christ in our own lives and have enriched our lives because of their focus.

[26 : 21] Father, we stop and we give thanks for such people. But Father, we pray that we'll be such people in the lives of others as well. For they are like the Lord and we wish to be like the Lord Jesus Christ as well.

Help us to be willing to die on the altar of the service of the best interests of our fellow Christians and all those that we meet and to die on the altar of the service of the gospel, the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.