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A Priceless Pair: Two Selfless Soldiers

Philippians 2:19-30

Please open your Bibles to the second chapter of Philippians as we continue our exposition of this wonderful letter that God sent to us through Paul the apostle. I'm going to read the text and then take a moment to build a bridge, as it were, from last Lord's Day to this one. If you were here then, please be thinking of the mind of Christ and what that means to you to have the mind of Christ in you, to have His inclination, His disposition, as we read of two selfless soldiers. Surely they constitute a priceless pair. Beginning to read with the nineteenth verse of Philippians chapter two:

¹⁹I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²²But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. ²³I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, ²⁴and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

²⁵I 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, ²⁶for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷Indeed 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. ²⁸I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. ²⁹So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, ³⁰for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

How we thank God for this, His inerrant Word.

If you do recall anything from last Lord's Day and worship, you know we were, as worshippers, eager to have the Mind of Christ in us, to have the humility of the Lord Jesus Christ, who didn't count all that he had in Glory to be something to be held onto, but rather, emptied Himself, making of Himself no reputation, taking upon Himself flesh, going to the Cross and dying *[in]* that hideous nature, that hideous death for us.

I jotted down something this week about humility, as I understand it and one of the great Websters in their dictionary said that humility is derived from the Latin "humus," meaning earth, meaning dirt. I can use that, because when young people ask me, "How old are you?" I say, "Old as dirt." But the nature of this is that dirt is the substance of the earth, that it's the lowest thing, the most taken for granted thing we have. Humility, I wrote down, is the nature, the character of the servant that leads to his service. Again, humility is the nature or the character of the servant that leads to his service.

We see Jesus' humility, giving everything up for us in great love, as Jesus putting our needs ahead of his divine entitlements. What do you learn from that? If the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity,

Very God of Very God, denied Himself of something for you, is it at all conceivable that you might deny yourself in the service of Christ for other people? And the essence of this is: perceiving others to be more important than yourself.

How *[do we]* build a bridge from that point to a personal application by Paul, through Timothy and Epaphroditus, of what it means to be a servant? What does a servant look like? How would you analyze or break down the servant's mind, the so-called submissive mind that leads to service? How would you do that?

I was looking for an appropriate bridge and it came very quickly from the Fuller family, from Brad and Mindy. Because we knew we'd been praying for some time for Mindy's sister, who lives in Mississippi, and she's a person with many needs. She has lots of struggles, many pressures, and she doesn't know the Lord. And that's the essence of her need. But her sister, Mindy's sister was going to move from one place in Mississippi, that is, Gulfport, to a place one hour away by car. And she was distressed because she really didn't have anybody to help her. There was a U-Haul, but there was nobody to really help her out.

Mindy, after praying, emailed a PCA church in Gulfport, First Presbyterian Church. And keep in mind that Mindy knew very well that she was emailing a church in a community hit by Hurricane Katrina a few years ago. That church lost its entire building, everything was gone. One-third of their families lost their homes, that is, their homes were totaled, one-third of their members. Mindy was calling a church that, by God's Grace, had rebuilt their church building, had rebuilt the homes of one-third of their members and had rebuilt 300 other homes of people devastated by Katrina in their community. I suppose that Mindy figured out, as I would have, that they were exhausted. That wouldn't be a likely church to call for help, would it? Or would it? Or would it?

Mindy emailed – it was an email, wasn't it Mindy, you sent to the church, to the email address of the church, mentioning the needs of her sister in this move. Her sister's not a Christian, much less a member of that church, as far as I know had not attended it, but had a real need. Well it wasn't long at all before a deacon called Mindy and said, "Sure, not a problem. If she wants us to help, we'll help. We'll turn out four or five guys to help her move." It was set up for that Saturday, and the U-Haul was available, the move was to be made, but Mindy got a call from her sister saying, "I haven't packed anything. I've got to cancel with those guys. I haven't packed anything at all." Mindy said, "Well, let them at least load your furniture. Some of those pieces are heavy. Would you at least let them load your furniture?" She said, "OK, OK." So the deacons brought not four or five, but actually brought eight, and they included the pastor and – listen up boys and girls – the pastor's eleven-year-old son. So, eight men, including this young man, showed up. Not a problem for Mindy's sister; they didn't just load her furniture on the U-Haul; they packed all her things in boxes for her. And she didn't lift a finger. Mindy's observation was *[that]* they treated her like a lady, and Mindy said, "I'm not sure she'd ever been treated this way in her adult life." She didn't have to lift a finger. They packed everything for her and loaded that into the U-Haul.

Wouldn't that be all? Well, surely that's enough. Wouldn't there be somebody at the other end, perhaps some other church out there. "No, don't worry about that." They drove the U-Haul, they took the one hour's trip, they all went along, they unloaded everything, they put the furniture where she wanted it, they unpacked all her boxes, and set up her apartment the way she wanted it. She didn't have to lift a finger. In the meantime, the pastor shared the Gospel with her. As far as we know, she's not yet received Jesus, but he shared the Gospel with her. Mindy's continued, of course, to talk with her sister

and her sister was, very candidly, blown away. In a way she was “scared,” those were her words, “I was scared to see this in anybody.” She’d never seen this. She’d never seen the Mind of Christ in other people. She’d never seen the attitude of Jesus in other people! By the way, the guys ordered pizza at their own expense and put gas in the U-Haul for her, too. And she marveled at that eleven-year-old boy who, to use her words, “worked cheerfully” all the day long, laboring to meet her needs.

Would you say that this is exactly what the apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote to Philippi, “I do want each of you to have this mind of Jesus, but I really want to see this mind,” how did the text put it? “...among you. I want your church to look like this. I want your church to be like this.”

Mindy remarked to me, “You know, I find it easier now to talk to my sister about the Lord, because she’s actually seen the Lord in these men.” She’s actually seen them in these guys, who had met her needs, and that young boy as well. Would you say that the Mind of Christ might be among those people of Gulfport at that PCA church? I think so. Oh, yes, I think so. But now here’s another kicker for us, because I think you know Mindy and love her and respect her. She said something to me that really got my attention in a hurry. She said, “You know, I corresponded with the pastor and assured him I would pass this along to my church, Eagle Heights, so we could pray for them.” And we’ve asked them, Mindy asked them to pray for us and to pray for our Pulpit Committee, pray for our officers, pray for our congregation, which I’m sure they’re doing. There’s been a lot of that. But then this is what Mindy said that was really, really a deep arrow into my heart, she said, “I’ve assured them that Eagle Heights is a church like that, too.” Does that get your attention? I believe it to be true, but we must see that, mustn’t we, in the reality of our service.

So, what Paul does here in the latter portion of chapter two in Philippians is simply to profile these two men, this priceless pair of individuals, these two selfless soldiers.

But very quickly I want to talk to you about their lives as they were splayed out in service to the Lord Jesus, their relationships and their responsibilities and their risks, but I want to close with a brief section on their recognition or their reward.

First, their relationships: Clearly, it was with the Lord Jesus. Of Timothy, Paul says that Timothy looks out for the interests of Jesus Christ. In a time, in a place, in a season when most people are looking out for number-one, that is, themselves and their own interests, Timothy has in the heart and mind the interests of the Lord Jesus Christ. So that relationship is clear that Timothy understood exactly who Jesus is, what Jesus had done for him and other sinners like him. So he’s looking out for the interests of Jesus Christ. And Paul says, “He has served with me in the Gospel.” He loved the Lord, but he loved the word of the Lord, didn’t he? He loved the Gospel. [*He had*] a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

And what about Epaphroditus? Well, Paul writes of him, “He nearly died for the work of Christ. This man was so caught-up in doing Christ work and ministering to me that he nearly died.” And of course the character of this man comes out. Oh, Epaphroditus here was quite anxious for a season, when he was ill almost to death. [*He was*] anxious about himself? No, no, no, no. [*He*] wasn’t a bit anxious about himself. He was anxious because the Philippians had heard that he was sick and about to die. Could that be the mind of Christ? I really think it is. In a time when a man is about to die from his illness he’s not concerned for himself, but was concerned for the Philippians because they’d heard he was sick and would be worrying about him. What is this? I’ll tell you what it is; it’s the mind of Christ. It’s a deep relationship with Christ. It’s an understanding of what Christ has done for us.

So their relationships were first with the Lord Jesus, but secondly, and clearly, they had good relationships with Paul. Paul writes of Timothy, “He is my son. He is my servant,” and here again in just a minute, “He’s my substitute. I send him off to other churches to represent Christ and me! He’s my son. He’s my servant. He’s my substitute.” And Paul says, “I have no one else like him.” Hm, “I have no one else like him.” As we’ll see in a minute, a young man, a shy man, a sickly man, “I have no one else like him.” I’d say that’s a good relationship with Paul.

How about Epaphroditus? Well, Paul calls him here my brother, fellow worker, and my fellow soldier; arm in arm with Paul, in the trenches, in the spiritual warfare, my fellow worker in the gospel, my dear brother in the faith. *[He had]* a relationship first with the Lord Jesus and secondly with Paul, and thirdly, obviously with the Philippians.

Of Timothy, Paul writes to the Philippian Church, “He has a genuine interest in your welfare. This man, Timothy, cares for you. That’s one reason why I’m sending him to you. He really cares about you.” So there really is a relationship established by Timothy with the Philippians. Paul says, “I’m going to make that concrete by sending him to you. So I can hear about you first hand and know that you’re OK in the Lord.” *[He’s]* genuinely concerned for your welfare.

How about Epaphroditus? Well, Paul writes of him, “He is your messenger. He is the one that you sent to be minister to my need...” By the way, I think it was Epaphroditus who carried the love offering from Philippi to Paul as Paul was in jail in Rome. I’m almost confident, I am confident, that it was Epaphroditus who carried the offering. But he went there to represent the Philippians by ministering to Paul. And Paul says that in taking care of me he got so sick he almost died. And out of that much sorrow had happened. But God spared him, and when He spared him he spared me. *[He had]* a relationship with the Lord and Paul, but also with the Philippians. He is your messenger. You sent him here to minister to me. You sent him here as a representative of your congregation. What relationships this priceless pair had.

But secondly, we said that they surely had some responsibilities. Isn’t that always the case that out of a relationship comes certain responsibilities? Of Timothy, Paul writes, “Timothy has proved himself,” I mentioned this earlier, although young, you can look that up in I Timothy 4:12, “Let no man despise you.” Though shy, you’ll find that in II Timothy 1:7, “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.” And *[he is]* sickly, you find that in I Timothy 5:23 – Timothy, take a little wine for your sick tummy. Young, shy, sickly, Paul has great confidence in him. He sends him also to Thessalonica. You see that in in I Thessalonians three, verses one, two, and three. This is what Paul writes,:

I Thessalonians 3:1-3

¹Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, ²and we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, ³that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this.

And he sends him to Corinth as well, does Paul. Sends him in I Corinthians 4:16 & 17, where Paul writes:

I Corinthians 4:16-17

¹⁶I urge you, then, be imitators of me. ¹⁷That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.

[This is] great stuff. The responsibility given to a young, shy, sickly man and he is very dependable. He

gets it done for the Glory of God and the good of the Gospel, the blessing of those in Philippi and Thessalonica and Corinth as well as Paul in Rome.

What about Epaphroditus *[and]* his responsibilities? Well, Paul writes, “He is longing for all of you.” In other words, he’s not simply homesick for Philippi the city, he’s longing for that body of Christ. Do you long for the body? Any time you’re out of it do you *long* for it? You can hardly wait to get back together with the saints of God in this place again to worship God together, to pray together, to sound the great call of the Gospel together. “Epaphroditus is longing for all of you.” Then Paul says, “He has made up for the help you couldn’t give me because you aren’t here. He’s made up for the help you couldn’t give me by risking his life to complete your service.” Isn’t that the way we should look at it as we send out representatives, missionaries and others that represent us and Christ in the Gospel? “He has risked his life.”

That leads us to the third after relationships and responsibilities. They had some risks didn’t they? What about Timothy? [He had] dangerous journeys and very, very, very difficult assignments. Paul did not send him to congregations that were in great shape. This Philippian church was struggling like everything. Remember enemies without, infiltration of false teachers within, all kinds of personal grievances being expressed and schisms in the body – tough. And Paul sends Timothy. Thessalonica? Same thing; great difficulties and struggles. Corinth? You know about that, don’t you? That’s the church that turned the Lord’s Supper into a drunken orgy. How would you like to go to that church? You like that? No. Oh my, you wouldn’t like that too much. That’s what Timothy did. That’s what Timothy did. *[He had]* dangerous, tough, hard assignments, but praise God, Timothy was dependable. And he went and served well in those places.

And what about Epaphroditus? Well, he made that dangerous journey from Philippi to Rome with a gift that, I am sure, robbers would have loved to have taken. He left his home; he left his home church – how difficult? When you are longing for your brothers and sisters in Christ, he left home, left his family, left there, left the family of the Lord in that place. And Paul points out, “He had very hard labors in jail with me.” Because those who went to minister to Paul in jail had to be subject to the rules of the jail. It wasn’t an easy thing. *[He had]* difficult labors in that jail with Paul. And then, of course, Epaphroditus found himself near to death, risking his life. “He nearly died for the work of Christ,” the apostle Paul writes, “Risking his life to complete your service to me because you’re not physically with me.” So we see how risky their service to the Lord was.

I know we’re not supposed to go out and create risk to serve Christ. I know that. But I have to ask you again, what have you undertaken for Jesus that has cost you anything at all – cost you in your life’s investment, cost you in time, cost you in your money, cost in your investment in who you are? What have you undertaken for Christ that’s been costly? What is it? What is it? Sure there are risks ahead of all of us, and there are risks before us. What have you risked for Him? What have you risked for Him in your responsibilities for Him and for others, in your relationship with Him and with each other and with them to whom God sends you? And sometimes those are hard, hard relationships.

What about the people who reject you? Oh, I know what you do. Didn’t Jesus say, “Shake the dust and move on!” Yeah, he really did say that, but did you look at the context where he said that? It was a context of persevering with these people in the Gospel. It was the context of continual rejection. But how many times do we knock on the door, hoping nobody’s home? I’ll never forget that – we had our elders lead the congregation in an evangelistic crusade in our local church in Georgia where we served and we came back to the church to share what the Lord had done and simply calling on people and

sharing Christ with them. And one of our elders was a very honest guy and said, “You know what, Corty?” He said, “I rang that doorbell hoping that nobody was home.” I know the feeling, don’t you? I’ve been there and done that. [We’re] just terrified to face people, terrified, but of course it’s a great privilege when you do it, but recognizing that there are risks in this? And it is certainly a risky business to serve Christ in these days. It’s risky from so many perspectives.

If you were to follow up on the Church in Gulfport you’ll discover that their service has been costly. You’ll discover that the stewardship of that body has been tested like never before. You’ll discover, I dare say, that there aren’t any very wealthy people undergirding this effort financially. I think you’ll discover that they’re like the Macedonian Christians, that out of tremendous desperation and poverty there came the wealth of generosity in the service of the Lord. And the Lord provides. Are you in a position now where you don’t really believe that? Are you not in a position where in recent years that the Lord provides for you? Then I would ask you very lovingly, as Pastor, are there those areas where you have proven that God has failed? Is there any area where God has really failed? Surely there have been those times in our lives when we have felt that way. But in truth, we have failed. Our neighbors have failed. The community has failed. The state and the nation and the world have failed, because we live in a fallen world! And the last thing we better do is blame God for that. It wasn’t God who fell! It was Adam and I in him and you in him. It was God who sent Jesus to die on that cross for us to receive us to Himself, to take away the sting and penalty of death forever, even to take away the sting of the grave forever. God is gracious and God is loving and God is always good.

I remember how we were struggling as a congregation where I was serving as interim. There were some real struggles that had to be dealt with and one of the elders had offered to stand up and lead the congregation in what was a little bit of, I suppose, a cant. He would say, “God is good...” And the congregation would respond, “...all the time.” God is good, and they respond, all the time – meaning when we’re looking at dismal circumstances. We’re looking at hard places. We’re looking at hard times. God is as good now as when we had bountiful blessings in human terms. God is good all the time. Do you suppose that’s the mind of Christ? God is good all the time? Whether I see it or know it or taste it today, He is, and I know it by faith.

Well, there it is. The bridge has been built. Where are you on the bridge? Where are you on the bridge? I think that we’re a lot like the Philippians. I think Paul understood very well that the Philippians would likely say, “Ah, yes, Paul is writing about Jesus and giving his own testimony, but that’s Jesus and that’s Paul. And we’re who we are. I think that’s exactly why he said, “OK, alright. I’m going to take one of you – one that you know very well named Epaphroditus, and I’m going to take one that I scooped up in Lystra and Derby just before I came to you on that second journey, Timothy, son of a Jewish mom and a Greek dad.”

Interesting, Paul, the Jewish Jew, and Timothy, half Jew and half Greek, and Epaphroditus, full Gentile. Oh, I love this. God doesn’t leave any out, does He? Where’s the excuse here? “I’ll take one of you, one who’s just like you.” He nearly died, but he showed the mind of Christ to everybody. And Timothy? Young, shy, and sick. Powerful in Jesus, the mind of Christ. Let’s pray.

Lord it is of Your Grace, Your Glory, the wonder of Your Truth that we’re here. Thank you, Lord God, for knocking out all the props, thank you for taking away all my excuses. Thank you for removing all the crutches. Thank you, Lord God, for the Word. It’s so plain, it’s so clear, and so wonderful. Lord, we do pray for the First Presbyterian Church in Gulfport, even as we pray for Mindy’s sister that she would know Christ and know healing in His Grace. We pray for this church, oh Lord. What an example they

are! And that would lead us to that last thing that Paul wrote about Epaphroditus, Paul wrote that saying, “Look, when he gets back home, honor him.” We ought to honor such men as this. Lord God, we know the beauty of that because Epaphroditus wasn’t hunting any honor, looking for any honor at all, nor was Timothy. But it’s to the shame of the Church when we don’t honor such men and we often don’t. We often don’t. Sometimes they are the most taken for granted of all and I know we are accountable for that. Paul wrote, “When Epaphroditus gets home, honor men like this, and when Timothy gets there, honor men like that. The last thing they want is honor, but you better give it to them.” Lord, we honor this church in Gulfport. We honor their pastor, their elders, and their deacons. We honor these men who ministered Your Grace to Mindy’s sister. We pray for that church. And, Lord, we thank You that You’re fashioning Eagle Heights to be exactly that kind of church, having – really having – the mind of Christ. Thank you, in Jesus name, amen.