

## ***the beauty of ordinary faith***

- **Logos Hope Team** commissioning

**In the time that I have**, I want to take us into a portion of Paul's letter to the Philippians that could seem irrelevant to us, with nothing of consequence for us, **and yet** which is actually so fitting for us today as we send off this team – but really, any Sunday, for that matter.

Although when I mapped out our study in Philippians a few months back, I had no idea we'd be commissioning these folks today – in today's passage in Philippians – **Philippians 2:19-3:1** – Paul steps aside from pastoral matters to address a practical matter – the matter of ***sending someone off to care for the needs of another***.

Which doesn't mean that this passage is just for the Logos Hope Team. Truth is, this is a word that is relevant for all of us.

So, let's start by simply reading and hearing the text.

### **Philippians 2:19-3:1a.**

*(19) "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send **Timothy** to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. (20) I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. (21) For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. (22) But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son [esv, "child"] with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. (23) I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. (24) And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.*

*(25) **But I think it is necessary** to send back to you **Epaphroditus**, my brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. (26) For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he will ill. (27) Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and*

*not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. (28) Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. (29) So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, (30) because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.*

*(3:1) Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord.*

### **Let's pray.**

I wonder how many of us have read this part of Philippians before? Anyone ever **memorized** it? **I doubt it.** It's the kind of passage that many of us skim or just skip – cause what relevance does this have to us...?

Paul steps away here from the really meat of the letter – his passion for the Philippians to know and trust and follow their Servant King Jesus... His longing for them to not give up on a gospel that won't give up on them... His concern for their unity and what will help them grow in unity – in the unity of the gospel...

And here, in **2:19f**, Paul seems to **take a pause** from the pastoral to handle some practical matters – to provide something of a **travel itinerary**. To explain why Timothy wouldn't be returning to them yet, and why, instead, Epaphroditus would be coming to them – with this letter.

As we've mentioned a few times in this study – Philippians is full of **life-verses**. Verses many of us have heard countless times.

Inspiring verses that stick in our minds. The kind of verses that end up tattooed on people's backs or posted on Instagram – or both!

But this is one passage that rarely makes it onto Instagram or Facebook. I have **never** stumbled across a social media post quoting **Philippians 2:28**, "*Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety.*" It's not your typical youth retreat slogan or verse of the year. None of this passage is.

**And yet**, there is actually so much here that is worth our notice and needed.

The simple fact that Paul includes this **in the middle** of his letter should grab our attention. Honestly, why include this right here and not at the end of the letter – which is what Paul normally would do. But here, he stops to talk about the why and what of Timothy and Epaphroditus' travel plans, ***right in the midst of his letter.***

Obviously, he's doing this for a reason. So why?

**Because Timothy and Epaphroditus** are **living examples** of what Paul's being talking about for the last two chapters.

He's been instructing and exhorting the Philippians to live in the way of Jesus – **to do nothing** out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility to value others above themselves... to **not look** to their own interests, but also to the interests of others... to **work out** their

salvation into every facet of their lives, because God is seeking this – at work in them – to this very end...

And then he takes **a pause** to talk about what's going on with Timothy and Epaphroditus – and **in so doing**, presents them to the Philippians (and to us) as **living examples** of people who are seeking and following Jesus in this way... who's lives are daily reflections of the character and concerns of Christ... **living examples** of the gospel being at work right before their eyes...

And there are **three** things in this that are beautiful and necessary for us to understand.

**First** is simply that these **two** people – Timothy and Epaphroditus – come from dramatically different backgrounds – upbringings, family experiences... And yet, by the grace of God, they are both now shining examples of the reconciling grace and redeeming power of Jesus.

If you've spent much time in the New Testament, you'll know **Timothy** as one of Paul's ministry partners and protégés. The opening words of this very letter read, "*Paul **and Timothy**, servants of Christ Jesus...*" (1:1). There are two whole letters in the NT that are addressed to Timothy – as a young pastor in a church founded by Paul. And in one of those letters – **2 Timothy 1:3-5** – we're told that

his sincere faith – *"first lived in [his] grandmother Lois and in [his] mother Eunice, and now... in him..."*

Which tells us Timothy was raised in a Christian home – with a godly Christ-honoring grandmother and mother.

And there – in that home and family – Timothy came to know and love and follow Jesus and become a shining example of the gospel. So that's Timothy.

And then there's **Epaphroditus**.

Honestly, we know very little about Epaphroditus beyond what Paul says here. **Except** for what we learn from the significance of his name. Truth is, his name tells us a lot – a lot about his family and what he grew up around.

Simply put, he didn't grow up around Jesus.

Epaphroditus didn't come from a Christian home – with Christian parents. His name is a greek name - a common name in his day. A name derived from the name **Aphrodite** – the well-known greek mythical goddess of love, beauty, pleasure, and procreation. In our day, people would describe Aphrodite as a sex goddess.

The simple fact that this was his name tells us that he was raised in a home that either worshipped Aphrodite or honored the values of Aphrodite.

You would not name your child this if it wasn't the case. *It would be like naming your son Trump these days. You wouldn't do it unless you meant it.*

Which means Epaphroditus didn't encounter the gospel in his home. He didn't grow up in the womb of the church. But somewhere along the way, the gospel reached him... Somewhere along the way, he encountered the gospel of Jesus and became a follower of Jesus – one whom Paul would ultimately describe as "*my brother, co-worker, fellow soldier, your messenger and minister to my need...*"

All that to say, hearing what Paul has to say about these two men reveals and reminds us that **the gospel can meet us wherever we are**, wherever **we've been**, and **whatever** we've come from – and make us into shining examples of the gospel.

Make **our story** into a story of grace...

And let me say specifically to the Logos Hope team – as you go and live and work and minister alongside people with all kinds of stories. Know that **your** story – **your testimony** – is as powerful a witness to the gospel as any – whether you are a Timothy, a Paul or an Epaphroditus.

So, that's the first dynamic in this passage that we need to recognize. The beautiful work of the gospel in two very different people from very different places...

The **second** is that, for all the glory and beauty of what Paul says about each of these men, as we read the passage, as we listen to Paul, we are invited to see that what this shining example of Christ-like faith and Christ-like living **looks like in action** is not necessarily anything grand, but actually very **ordinary – even mundane** – acts of obedience and service for the sake of Christ and others.

Right? What has Epaphroditus done here?

He's brought provisions to Paul – financial assistance (possibly to cover his cost of daily food in prison). And he's come with word from Philippi. ***That's about it.***

And along the way, he's got sick. Horribly sick. At one point, Paul wondered if he'd survive. *And he's the one who's come to help Paul.*

And what's Timothy done? He's stuck by Paul through it all. He's stuck by Paul in his time of need.

Neither of these men's accomplishments – as described for us in **Philippians 2:19f** – are really that grand. Nothing you'd write a memoir about.

**And yet**, according to Paul, **they are to be honored**. Honored as exemplars of the faith.

Which tells us that a life that honors Jesus does not need to be filled with spectacular experiences or acts, but is much more about

**everyday obedience** and **ordinary service** – all unto Christ and for the good of others.

Let me read you something that I came across this week in my study. Hear the wise words of Fred Craddock – a retired New Testament professor. He says,

"To give my life for Christ appears glorious. To pour myself out for others... to pay the ultimate price of martyrdom—I'll do it. I'm ready, Lord, to go out in a blaze of glory..."

We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking a \$1000 bill and laying it on the table—"Here's my life, Lord. I'm giving it all."

But the reality for most of us is that he sends us to the bank and has us cash in the \$1000 **for quarters**. We go through life putting out 25 cents here and 50 cents there. Listen to the neighbors kid's troubles instead of saying, "Get lost." Go to the committee meeting. Give a cup of water to a shaky old man in a nursing home. Show up for a friend in need.

Usually giving our life to Christ isn't glorious. It's done in all those little acts of love, **25 cents at a time**. It would be easy to go out in a flash of glory; it's harder to live the Christian life little by little over the long haul.'" (119)

And yet, in this passage, Paul affirms – God affirms through Paul – that this is the call of Christ. That radical, God-honoring faith is lived out in **ordinary acts of service** and **everyday obedience**.

***One quarter at a time.***

Which again, makes me think about those of you who are heading off on the Logos Hope trip... And I wonder how many of you have had moments over the last while when you've questioned the gospel significance of what you are about to go do – knowing that it



might involve some menial and mundane work at times, some unseen tasks that don't seem that worthy of a team flying all the way across a continent.

And I'm sure **you will** have moments on the trip – when you are serving food in the dining hall, or scrubbing the deck, or painting a roof, or selling books in the store, or setting up chairs for a service, when you will wonder if this really matters...

Which is something **we all face** all the time, I suspect. Most of our lives, most of the time, don't seem that profound or dramatic. Our life of faith does not look anything like that of the Apostle Paul. And we can look at the ordinariness of our everyday lives with God – *and wonder if this really matters.*

And yet here in this *seemingly insignificant* portion of Paul's letter to the Philippians, we are invited to see and celebrate that the ordinary stuff of our lives – which is most of our lives – is the very place where our faith in Jesus and service to Jesus is lived out.

***One quarter at a time.***

*Little by little – over the long haul.*

Ok, third and lastly, and it's not something we learn from considering Timothy or Epaphroditus – but it's something we learn in all this about the Apostle Paul.

Let's go back to that verse I referenced early on as one verse that you'll never see on a social media post – **Philippians 2:28**,

*"Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety."*

I don't know if it stands out to you, but I was a bit stunned to read **those last few words** the first time I came across them – Paul's open admission that he experiences **anxiety**.

This is same apostle who later in this very letter, **Phil 4:6**, **exhorts us to**,

*"Be anxious about nothing, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present our requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

**That's a life-verse.** And yet here, we are invited to **take** the Apostle Paul off his untouchable pedestal – and see him as another companion in Christ – who experienced anxiety like many of us.

And **deep sorrow** at times. Again, the apostle who speaks often of his **joy in Christ**, did so in the midst of deep sorrow. Right? That's what Paul tells us when he speaks of Epaphroditus' recovery from his illness. He says, "**But God had** *mercy on him, and not on him only **but also on me, to spare me sorrow on sorrow.***"

In other words, Paul was **already** experiencing a deep sorrow – maybe simply in being imprisoned, or his separation from the Philippians, or his concerns about their situation.

And in the midst of all this, he didn't know what was going to happen next to him. Despite his faith that God would use whatever would happen, and his **hope** that God would deliver him (so he could come be with the Philippians again), he kept Timothy with him ***because he didn't know what the coming days would bring***. His faith did not mean perfect certainty and clarity.

All that to say, in this *seemingly insignificant* portion of Paul's letter, we are invited to catch another glimpse of the reality – the good news – that God uses **us in our frailty and incompleteness**. He doesn't just save broken vessels. He uses broken vessels.

I love that Paul doesn't think that real faith requires him to deny his need. No, Paul's faith was not diminished by his willingness to share his need. Just the opposite, in sharing his need God was glorified. Because it proved that the power of the gospel is from God.

That's what Paul says in **2 Corinthians 4:6-7**.

*"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.*

*But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."*

Amen.

Maybe its time to post **Philippians 2:28** on social media.

To celebrate the reality that God uses jars of clay. That our fears and anxieties, our sorrows and needs do not disqualify us from

being used by God, but can be the very cracks through which the  
gospel is revealed - "***to show that this all-surpassing power is  
from God and not from us.***"

Amen.

**Let's pray.**

Invitation to the Lord's Table -----