

A Quiet Servant

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Well, our text tonight comes from Philippians 2 and I invite you to turn to Philippians 2. As you do, I would just want to say this, most of us spend our Christian lives in a way that doesn't bring public attention to ourselves and along with that when you think about some of the great heroes in Scripture, you think about the Apostle Paul or Peter and the greatness of the things that God did through them, it can sometimes seem like, if we're not careful, that those biblical examples are somewhat removed from the nature of our lives and it's helpful to bring our focus to someone who is not a major figure in Scripture and yet had a role to play and played it well and we find in this so-called minor character of Scripture a pattern that encourages us all in our own service to the Lord.

Philippians 2, beginning in verse 25 is our text tonight as we read about this man named Epaphroditus. Philippians 2:25, the Apostle Paul says,

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.

You know, we live in a culture that is obsessed with celebrity not only in the world generally speaking in the secular world, but also in the Christian world. It's a well-known fact that the content of a proposed book, for example, is much less important to publishers than the audience that the author brings and the number of sales that they can count on based on the author's audience and who he has following him. The rise of TV programs with Christian emphasis and stage sets and all of that all play into this mindset and create this idea of celebrity being that which is hyper super Christian. It is so refreshing to come to the word of God and to see something completely different on display, to see something completely different commended. We not only find

encouragement in our own humble walks before Christ, we also get discernment for the world in which we live and learn not to be taken away and swept away with these worldly and really ungodly perspectives on spiritual life and find in Scripture a pattern that we can all follow and find ourselves attracted to and able to fulfill in a way that gives us confidence of one day each one of you that walks with Christ and serves him so faithfully, to have confidence that despite your lack of celebrity that there is the expectation that the Lord will welcome you into his heaven with those precious words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Master." I can't help but think those thoughts as we approach this text about this otherwise forgotten man named Epaphroditus.

Now let me just give you a couple of bits of context about Epaphroditus and then the context of the text before we move into things. Epaphroditus had a specific role to play in the relationship between the church at Philippi and the Apostle Paul at this time in Paul's life. He was a messenger. He was a servant who the church at Philippi appointed to carry their monetary gift to Paul in Rome and to safely and securely deliver it so that the apostle's needs were met.

We see this plainly set forth in chapter 4, verse 18, if you will look at that with me, please. Paul has been talking about and I was finishing my preparation for this text even this morning and we won't get to it for quite a long time, but in chapter 4, verse 15, Paul is thanking them for the gift that they had sent to him and he mentions in passing, verse 18, he says, "I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God." And so they had sent Epaphroditus as their messenger, the words literally that's used in chapter 2 is literally "their apostle," the one who they sent and represented them, Epaphroditus carried this gift from the church to Paul.

Now that tells you an awful lot about the nature of the man simply by that general fact. What does it tell you about Epaphroditus that he was chosen for a task like that? It tells you, if nothing else, it tells you that they knew his character to be trustworthy to put a substantial financial sum in his hands and know that he's not going to abscond with it. They trusted him to go and to carry and to have the character and the integrity to deliver that without skimming some off the top for himself. We have a number of men in our church who come from financial backgrounds and I appreciate the integrity that they bring to matters like this, and that we're able to trust them in the matter of a financial realm. Well, you see, things haven't changed. They needed a man, the church needed a man that they could trust to do that. Epaphroditus had proven his trustworthy character over time or they never would have sent him on the task.

Along with that, it wasn't simply a delivery service, this wasn't simply the first century version of door dash that was being executed here, Epaphroditus was obviously a man of some Christian character and some Christian comfort which they would have known because they would have sent a man to be with Paul to deliver this to Paul in a way that also would have brought spiritual encouragement to him. So he was a trustworthy man, a

man of encouragement, and we see this displayed as Paul writes about him in the letter that they sent to him, but for the purposes of right now, I just want you to see that there was a real human role that Epaphroditus had to play between the church and with Paul that's illustrated there in chapter 4. He delivered the gift to the Apostle Paul. So hold that thought in your mind.

Now in the broader context where Paul is talking about Epaphroditus in those verses that I read earlier, let me just remind you that in the immediately preceding context he had talked about Timothy. Timothy was with Paul during his imprisonment in Rome. He was ministering to Paul and Paul had plans, you'll recall, to send Timothy to Philippi to help them deal with the spiritual struggles that they were having in the church. There was conflict, there was some division going on, Paul could not tend to it personally because he had chains on him that kept him from going, and so Paul had to send someone on his behalf and so he sent Timothy and we looked at that a Sunday back. The point is this and just by way of review, Paul had spoken about Timothy and commended him to the Philippians and what we said about Timothy was this, is that Timothy represented some of the highest and most noble aspects of Christian character. He represented a spirit of sacrifice, a spirit of concern for the church, and a spirit of faithfulness that had been manifested in his ministry to the Apostle Paul. Paul sends him at personal sacrifice in verses 19 and 20. He says, "I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare that I can send." Paul sacrifices to send Timothy. Timothy was a man that Paul knew would show concern for the body of Christ, stay with me here, and along with that, along with that spirit of sacrifice and concern, Timothy had proven himself faithful. If you look at verse 22, Paul says about Timothy, he says, "you know of his proven worth," it was proven, proven by his faithfulness over time, "that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father."

And what we said at the end of our message, the end of our time about Timothy was this, is that by the grace of God a quiet faithfulness produces a life that is worthy of the Gospel. You could say it this way, that one of the aspects, one of the out workings of God's grace is that he develops in people just like you and me, he develops over time this spirit of faithfulness that expresses itself in love and concern for other Christians, for faithfulness in the tasks and a willingness to sacrifice for the sake of the Gospel and for the sake of other believers. You don't make celebrity shows around these noble character virtues but this is what Scripture commends to us. So you and I, we need to kind of absorb what's being said here and realize that there are deep and profound undercurrents to what Paul is saying here about the nature of Christian character that far transcend simply the outward facts about the lives of Timothy and Epaphroditus. These men represent something else, they represent and they show us and they exemplify for us the character that God produces in true believers. And more than that as we've pointed out over the past several weeks, they are representing and they exemplify in a simple somewhat common human life, you might say, they exemplify the very attitude and the very character of our Lord himself.

Look over at verse 7 of chapter 2 where Paul is commending the attitude of humility to the church, illustrating it with the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. What did Christ do?

He "emptied Himself," he humbled himself, in other words, "taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Christ sacrificing himself for his people. Christ sacrificing himself as we saw on Sunday out of the love of God for his people, the love of God sending Christ to be the Savior of his people, Christ in that spirit of love, making himself a sacrifice, being faithful to the ones that he came to save, being faithful to the assignment and will of his Father, Christ doing that to perfection, Timothy and Epaphroditus illustrating it in the course of their humble lives in the first century now recorded for us in Scripture for us to learn from and to follow in like example. Young men are often attracted into ministry because they've been attracted by an example that has had prominence in the public, but there comes a point where we have to separate and a young man needs to separate out the aspect of celebrity from his own desire and pursuit to manifest a life of sacrifice, concern and faithfulness, and by that emulate Christ himself and not the high-profile example of a man who might have first attracted you into ministry. So we find these things all commended to us in the text here this evening and so I'm glad to be able to do this. What Paul does in this section of Scripture, verses 25 to 30, is that he is commending the service that Epaphroditus gave to the church who sent him. He's telling the church, "Epaphroditus did well. Receive him and honor him with joy." And these traits shine out again in tonight's text.

So it occurred to me, I am using the exact same points for this message about Epaphroditus that I used with Timothy, they're just in a slightly different order, but they are the exact same points in order to reinforce the importance of these character traits as we see them. They're all right there on the surface and so we're going to look at this from that perspective. Three traits that we want to see from the life of Epaphroditus and the first is this, it's the attitude of faithfulness. The attitude of faithfulness. We saw it in Timothy, we see it now in Epaphroditus, both men illustrating the character traits that Paul is calling the entire church to do.

And Epaphroditus stands out in his faithfulness as we look at verse 25. Paul says,

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;

Notice, my friends, the affectionate term and the affirming terms that Paul uses to describe Epaphroditus. He calls him "my brother, my fellow worker, my fellow soldier, your messenger," and so these affectionate terms show that Paul had a lot in common with Epaphroditus; even though he is the apostle and Epaphroditus is this humble servant, they had so much in common. As a fellow worker, they had a spirit of camaraderie. They shared the time together, they shared labor together, and they did so in a common attitude of love for Christ and for one another that knit their souls together, and the picture of a fellow soldier gives the idea of Christians fighting side-by-side. He uses all of these different word pictures to exemplify how much he shared in common with Epaphroditus

and how noble the character of this man was, and collectively the terms show you how much Paul thought about Epaphroditus.

You know, just put yourself with the great office that Paul held in the church as an apostle of Christ and the fame that he had and the strategic role that he played in the spread of the Gospel on his different missionary journeys and so forth, put yourself in the sandals of Epaphroditus and think about what those words of commendation meant. It's one thing to have a lowly person commend you, but to have someone like the Apostle Paul point to you, as it were, and said, "This is my brother, this is my fellow worker, this is my fellow soldier," you get a sense of how much Paul is laying his mantle of credibility on Epaphroditus and sharing it with him in a public way for the rest of the church to see and to emulate. So Epaphroditus had served in the love of his heart and with the deeds of his hands, and in so doing he effectively helped Paul advance the work of the Gospel while Paul was in chains next to a Roman soldier. So this man had served the church well as their messenger to Paul. He had faithfully served the church and carried out the task that they had given him to do and he had helped Paul in the process as well and been an obvious encouragement to him.

Now in that, every one of us, each one of us can see things that we can emulate. The public profile of the tasks that we do within the body of Christ, the public profile of that is not important, it is secondary to that attitude of faithfulness that we bring to it, something behind the scenes done with faithfulness is under the eye of the Lord as much as any public proclamation of God's word is. And so it's not the nature of the task itself but the attitude which is brought to it that Christ commends and that Christ rewards in the church and I find that very encouraging to know. I don't have to be a public Christian in order for Christ to receive my service and to honor it and to bless it in the end. I don't have to be a public figure and I don't have to be a celebrity in order to be able to anticipate those words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." I don't have to do that and neither do you. That frees us to have an entirely different perspective on our service. We can do it with joy under the eye of the Lord and be content there knowing that Christ has a way of taking care of things in the economy with which he operates the church. It's about faithfulness, not the task that's done. It's about faithfulness not the public profile with which it is done.

If you think back over the last 2,000 years of the Christian church and the literally millions of Christians that there have been, with the small exception of real giants like Luther and Calvin and Augustine and Athanasius and Spurgeon and a few assorted men like that and some missionary heroes you could throw in there, you know, if you added them all up and, you know, you'd start to run out of names after, what, 500, 1,000 maybe or so? Think about what that means for the rest of the history of the church and the Christians that have been in the church, just speaking in very round numbers. It means that the vast vast vast majority, the predominant majority of Christians have been received into heaven having lived lives that were forgotten on earth, and lived in obscurity but received into splendor when they passed into eternity.

Well, it shows us just by way of proportion, it shows us how much the essential nature of the church is grounded in people who have no public profile of which to speak. And you know, that's completely countercultural, isn't it, in terms of what our world loves and what our world is attracted to. This is completely countercultural. It helps us understand that when we, as it were, we step out of the world and into the church, to understand that we're stepping into a realm of completely different priorities, completely different affections, and a whole different realm of character traits is honored and esteemed by Christ that have no currency in the world, and it's liberating to be able to leave that other stuff behind. We don't have to be people of external beauty to serve well in the church. We don't need to be people of prominence to serve well in the church. We don't need to be people who others know in order to be under the tender, careful supervision of our gracious Lord watching over our every step and numbering every hair on our heads. We see in these things that are given to us in Scripture how different the realm of the church is from the realm of the world, and it's what you would expect having a humble Christ ruling over the church versus a proud and demented and diabolical Satan reigning over and ruling over the world. You see the conflict, the conflict between the values is a reflection of the different realms that are at stake between the world and the church, and that's just a reflection of the ultimate head of the church versus the one whom Scriptures call the one who rules over this evil world system. So there's so much that's wrapped up into these attitudes that we see. It's a reflection of much broader, deeper issues.

Well, let's go to, secondly, Epaphroditus and his attitude of concern. His attitude of concern. Paul is now going to explain why it is that he was sending Epaphroditus back to Philippi. He had said in verse 25, "I thought it necessary to send him to you," and now in verse 26 he explains why. He says "because," and now he's going to give the reason that he was going to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi. "I'm sending him back to you,

26 because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.

Epaphroditus had served Paul well and we know that from all of the things that Paul said about him in verse 25, "my fellow worker, my fellow soldier, my brother." Epaphroditus had been serving right along and in a spirit of love and harmony with Paul that had to be precious to both of them, and yet there was in the heart of Epaphroditus, there was a heart longing for the people back home, the people back in Philippi. He was concerned about them and why was he concerned about them? This is counter-intuitive and this is the reason that he was distressed is so sweet and so humble, he was longing for you all, verse 26, this is, you know, pictures an ongoing attitude that was continually with him at this point, Epaphroditus was longing for you all and he was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. He was concerned about the Philippians being concerned about him. He didn't want them to worry about his condition and yet somehow they had known that he had been ill and Epaphroditus is concerned to alleviate their anxiety over his well-being, and you just see the sweet humility that's over this. He wanted to get back to the church so that he could reassure them that all was well and that they could have a greater peace of mind. He was distressed because they had heard that he was sick and he wanted to alleviate their anxiety.

Do you know what? As you read this and you think through what the text is telling us about this man, Epaphroditus was more concerned about their inner trouble than he was about his own physical affliction. He didn't want them to be concerned and so he wanted to go back and be present with them so that they could understand that he was fine and that they would not have to be concerned about him. He was distressed over their concern for him.

Now Paul says in verse 27 and he emphasizes just how bad the situation was for Epaphroditus. He emphasizes it there in verse 27. He says,

27 ... 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.

Paul tells the church, he says, "It may have been more serious than you even realize. He nearly died from this." And the consequence of this is that the spirit of sacrifice and faithfulness that Epaphroditus was manifesting in his life had led him to the very point of losing his life. For the sake of the Philippians and on the errand that they had sent him, he nearly died as a result of it. In his love and concern for Paul and carrying out his duties to Paul, it nearly killed him. That's how serious and how profound it was and so Paul tells them, "It was a serious condition. This was no trifling matter." But he says, "But God had mercy on Epaphroditus to heal him," and he says incidentally and you get a sense of how much Epaphroditus meant to Paul, he says, "It wasn't just that He was having mercy on Epaphroditus, He had mercy on me because if I had lost Epaphroditus at this time, the waves of sorrow that would have been upon me in my imprisonment would have been almost unbearable. And so God spared me of that grief even as He spared Epaphroditus' life, and so God's mercy is on display, His grace to spare us from all of that affliction was on full display." So if Epaphroditus had died, it would have made Paul's imprisonment even worse.

You know, I debated whether to say this but I'm going to say it and I say it gently and just by way of giving everyone something to contemplate rather than trying to get anybody to change anything that they're doing in life and in the world, not just in this room but beyond the walls of Truth Community Church to the Christian assembly generally speaking. In this time of many seemingly endless news reports about COVID and all of these things, and you know, people are dying and people are in ICU and I get all of that and I have no criticisms for those who take it seriously and want to guard and protect themselves from what they perceive the threat of that to be. This is not about masks or social distancing or anything else, this is about the way that we live and the motivations that we bring to life. Epaphroditus came close to the point of death for the sake of serving Christ and he gladly put his life at risk for the sake of serving Christ. I fear that, I fear that fear is so, fear about physical matters is so overwhelming people in the church today that they are losing all sight of proportion and all sight of perspective about serving Christ in the midst of it without fear. You know, it's not good for people to be so afraid that they just hide in a closet for month after month after month. Beloved, this is not what God has

called us to do. We are not to be controlled by fear. That is all that I am saying and there is more to life than physical concerns. We need to be serving Christ, we need to love Christ, we need to trust Christ, and that's all that I'm saying. But the environment in some portions of the church today, listen, let's be honest with one another and humble ourselves before the Lord, the environment in some circles of professing Christendom today would never produce an Epaphroditus because people are so afraid of sickness and death that they won't even step out of their own houses. Now that tells us that something is wrong with what our priorities are and the way that we are viewing things. I'm not telling anyone to change any of the precautions that they're taking, I'm simply wanting to encourage people to examine what it is that they're living for and why it is that fear is a greater motivation than anything else in some people's lives right now so that they're afraid of their own shadow giving them COVID. The word of God speaks to us and we just want to apply it at every point and to apply it at the point of life that we find ourselves in today.

Look at it there. It goes on, it goes on to say there in verse 30, let's jump ahead in the text just so I can complete my point and then we'll circle back around to it again.

"Epaphroditus came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me." He put his life on the line for the sake of Christ and I think it's just really without question that there are a lot of circles today that have no concept of living for things that are beyond the physical and beyond preserving physical life, and the reason for that is fear and fear is not a motivation that Christians should be responding to. That's all I'm saying.

So we see this attitude of concern, we see this attitude of faithfulness, and now the crisis here for Epaphroditus, the crisis has passed and in verse 28 Paul selflessly in a sacrifice of his own sends Epaphroditus away. Verse 28,

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.

What Paul is setting forth here is, "Epaphroditus is concerned for you, he wants you to be of peace of mind about his condition. He has recovered now physically, the Lord has had mercy on him and he's recovered now, and so I'm going to send him back to you," that's the sense of "therefore" in verse 28, "Therefore because of his concern for you at the church, because he has recovered, because I can spare him now, I'm sending him to you all the more eagerly. I happily send him to you so that you can see him, you will rejoice and I can be less concerned about the troubled condition of your heart." And so the crisis was gone and Paul gladly sends Epaphroditus back to Philippi to minister to the church and it was the mutual concern that Epaphroditus and Paul had for the church that prompted and enabled that decision to take place.

So there's faithfulness and concern, this wrapped all around these relationships that we see, and let's just rehearse these for a moment and keep them in mind. You have the attitude of concern that the Philippians had for Paul, they knew he was in need and so they wanted to send a gift to support him. Epaphroditus is concerned for the church, he's

concerned for Paul. Paul is concerned for the church and for Epaphroditus and sends him back, and everything about this is just woven like strands of DNA wrapped around each other, all of this love and concern being reflective of what the healthy body of Christ looks like.

And one of the things that I realize that I'm biased as the pastor of the church here, but it's just a great encouragement to me to be able to preach to people who manifest this kind of faithfulness and concern for one another. This is written all over the relationships that are manifest in the church after every service, and during the week as you guys are interacting with each other, this love and concern is a mark of the work of the Spirit of God in your heart. It's one of the ways that each one of you is bringing glory to Christ through the lives that you're living and it's a joy to see. And you know, lately our church has been, there have been a lot of new people coming, some visiting, some staying and all of that, the thing, I had an email just today from someone who was with us on Sunday, the consistent thing that I hear from visitors about our church is how warmly they were welcomed, how much they were received, and that is a reflection on you not on me because I haven't been talking to them. I talk to, you know, when there's 200 people and I talk to two or three, it can't be about me. It's a reflection of what's taking place in the pews as you welcome people and see them and open their arms. And in that, you are manifesting this very same spirit of concern and faithfulness that Scripture is commending, and what a blessing to be a part of for me simply to be a part of a church like this as you all do that. On Sunday, we're going to recognize some more deacons, that's going to be a great time in the church, they're simply representative of what we're seeing in the lives of so many others.

It's a great great time to be at Truth Community Church and I'm just grateful to God. I'm very grateful to God and I'm grateful because of you and I want that emphasized as we move on to point number 3: the attitude of sacrifice. The attitude of sacrifice. We've already alluded to this but Paul tells the church in verse 29 and 30, he tells the church to welcome Epaphroditus back, to receive him well, and it's interesting, verse 29, he says this,

29 Receive him then in the Lord with all joy,

He tells the church to welcome Epaphroditus back in the sphere of Christ, in honor of Christ, in the joy of Christ, and to receive him back and then in verse 29 at the end there,

and hold men like him in high regard;

He says, "Welcome him back and esteem him, honor him, recognize that there is a noble man in your midst that you should be glad to see and that you should take note to imitate him in your own life. Receive him in joy and hold him in high regard."

Now the fact that the command is necessary, the fact that Paul tells them to do this suggests the possibility that perhaps, remember this was a church that was having conflict and had pockets of division in it, perhaps it's possible that there were pockets of people

who had their doubts about Epaphroditus. "Why did he come back now? Was he really that sick? You know, did Paul not want him? Is that why Paul's sending him back is because he wanted to get rid of him?" Whatever the questions may have been in some of the pockets of the church, Paul is putting all of those concerns to rest, writing as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, writing as the founder, the founding apostle of the church at Philippi, writing as the one to whom they sent their gift, Paul in an imperative tells them, "Receive him with joy. Make him feel welcome and hold him in high regard in a manner that is fitting with the fact that he has served Christ with distinction, he has served you with distinction and therefore give him the honor that accords with what he has done."

So if there were those in the church that were not sure about Epaphroditus, Paul tells them to put those concerns aside and welcome him back with honor, give him a hero's welcome, throw out the red carpet, welcome him back and honor him when you do because Paul, so to speak, Paul's saying, "I'm not sending back a failure, I'm sending a hero back." It's only one not a whole army coming back but, you know, you think back to the way when the troops came home after World War II and you see the crowds that were welcoming them and the confetti and all of the joyful celebrations that were there as they marched down the main streets of major cities and they're welcomed back because the soldiers had served well and had protected their freedoms and had done and accomplished something on behalf of a grateful nation. It is often said in military funeral when the flag is presented to the family, "On behalf of a grateful nation, we thank you." Well, it's something like that as Paul sends this fellow soldier back and says, "Don't treat him like they did the troops that returned from Vietnam, treat him like he's a conquering hero from World War II," is the sense. "Give him honor when he returns." One writer said this contemplating that perhaps there were those who doubted Epaphroditus, he said and I quote, "Paul would answer that criticism in advance by a glowing appraisal of the worth of their leader and a record of the circumstances which led to his departure homeward." Paul had penned a Purple Heart on Epaphroditus. "This man was wounded in action. This man was wounded in combat. Now he's well and I'm sending him back. Give him the honor that the medal of my affirmation deserves."

So the church hearing this was being conditioned to receive Epaphroditus appropriately. Paul defends his honor in advance. This man had sacrificed for Christ and as a result of that, the church should rejoice at the privilege of having such a man in their midst and they should consider him a spiritual example. "Epaphroditus, tell me how you did it. What did you do when you went to Rome? What is it that motivates you? How is it that you're not tempted to steal the things that are entrusted to you? What did you say to Paul? What did you guys do together? How was it that you got so close to the apostle under such difficult conditions? Tell me so that I can learn and I can appropriate and when my opportunity comes to serve others, I'll have something to draw upon because of the benefit of the example that you've given to me."

He was worthy of the honor and he was faithful to the point of death as we saw in verse 30. Look at it again.

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

It's not that he's saying that the church was a failure, it's just that they needed someone to be able to do in Rome what they could not do from Philippi. And so they should welcome him for two reasons: he had nearly died for the sake of faithful service, and he had bridged a gap between them and Paul. They wanted to minister to Paul but they couldn't all go and so Epaphroditus went as their representative and fulfilled all of their desires and accomplished all of their objectives and through that one man so much was accomplished.

And you know, I like to remember this, I can't remember, I've said things like this in the past about other Bible characters but I don't remember as I stand here who I'm referring to. I'll have to go back and look at my notes if I remember and want to do it. But here's what you need to see, beloved, is that when Paul is writing these things about Epaphroditus, this is more than a horizontal affirmation of one man upon another man in the presence of still other men. Paul, let me remind you, Paul was writing under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Paul was writing what the Holy Spirit wanted said in this moment. And so not only are we reading what Paul thought about this humble man's service, we are reading the direct word of God about what God thought about this man's service. In the throne room of heaven, in the mind and estimate of God, this humble man who carried a bag of money across miles to get it to Rome, what he had done was worthy of this kind of commendation, so much so that it is preserved in Scripture for us to contemplate and learn from 2,000 years later.

Epaphroditus went to Rome, he served in Rome, he nearly died in Rome, and when it says there, look at verse 30 there with me, it says "he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient," it has the idea that he was gambling with his life. He didn't know what the outcome was going to be. It was as though there was a roll of dice and maybe it will come up and he lives, maybe it will come up and he dies, he doesn't know but it was more important to him to serve Christ faithfully, to serve his fellow believers faithfully, that was more important to him than life itself, more important than his security, more important than his economic situation, serving Christ was the preeminent joy and privilege and responsibility he had and everything else fell under that in importance. "If it cost me my life, I'll die, at least I go out serving Christ."

So this dear man gave little thought to his personal comfort, his personal safety, and Paul wanted them to know how highly he thought of him. That sacrificial attitude, that attitude of concern and love, that faithfulness to a task sounds an awful lot like the Christ we read about earlier in chapter 2, doesn't it? "He existed in the form of God but did not regard that a quality, a thing to be grasped but emptied Himself taking the form of a bond-servant and being made in the likeness of men." So beloved, when Paul has said and I point these things out so many times because I'm hopeful that years from now when I'm gone and forgotten about, you'll be able to come to chapter 2 and reproduce the theme of the chapter in your own mind. When Paul says in chapter 2, verse 3, "Do nothing from

selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves," look at what he's done, he's illustrated it with the Lord Jesus Christ, he's illustrated it with Timothy, he's illustrated it with Epaphroditus, and his own life was an example of this. This is what Christian character looks like. This is what the priorities and affections of the heart of a true believer are, sacrifice and love for the church and faithfulness to the task. This is what Christ produces, he reproduces his own life and likeness in the life of his people and so this is what we aim our own lives after. Beloved, a biblical church, a biblical Christian is built on the foundation of these attitudes, these attitudes of faithfulness, concern and sacrifice, and when you understand that, you see how badly the celebrity mindset of our age, how superficial it is and how completely misplaced and wrong it is.

Pastor Kent Hughes said this in summarizing about Epaphroditus. He said and I quote, "Epaphroditus served in no public capacity. He did not shepherd a flock as did Timothy. He did not take the gospel to an unreached area. He did not receive special revelation and he wrote nothing. All he did was faithfully discharge his duty by delivering a bag of money to Paul and then by looking after him, yet he is called by Paul, brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier, and minister." Pastor Hughes says this, "We must understand that to serve in some unnoticed, unrecognized place in the body of Christ is as much the work of Christ as is public ministry."

And so, beloved, as we close chapter 2 to Philippians this evening, Timothy and Epaphroditus become signposts that are pointing us to what Christ is like, to what Christian life is like, and their lesser examples remind us of the greater concern for the church that Christ showed, the greater concern and faithfulness that Christ showed and continues to show to the church as he intercedes for us continually at the right hand of the Father. It shows us the sacrifice and reminds us of the greater sacrifice that Christ offered on our behalf at the cross, laying down his life for us. And as we've said on Sunday, the cross of Jesus Christ proves to us divine love in an undeniable way. You cannot deny the love that is involved in the sacrifice of Christ.

And so as his people we have a blessed refuge in him, and let me just encourage you, my friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ, this evening in these times of fear and uncertainty, to take your sins to Christ and pour out your heart to him. Take your sorrows to Christ and pour out your heart to him. Take your sufferings to Christ and pour out your heart to him. We've already seen that the attitude of Christ toward his people is one of concern and faithfulness and sacrifice. He receives us. You can trust him. He excels all of these human examples by a degree of infinity and we can go to him and find the refuge for our souls. As you do that, ask him, I would encourage you, I would ask you to ask Christ to reproduce these virtues of sacrifice and love and faithfulness in your own life toward the people of God and we'll trust him to build us into what he wants us to be and we'll go on wings of angels into heaven to join the hallelujah chorus around the throne of the Lamb.

Let's pray together.

Father, we pray that You would make us like Christ and as You make us like Christ, we thank You for a humble example like Epaphroditus. God, give us grace and wisdom and discretion and discernment to see when opportunities present themselves to us in our circle of life and influence to replicate these attitudes of love, faithfulness and sacrifice in the life that You give to us. I thank You deeply and profoundly that You've brought so many people to Truth Community Church that are exactly like this. Father, help them all to excel still more as we grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ under the influence of Your wonderful Holy Spirit upon us. And Father, for those that are here that are not in Christ and all of these things that are foreign to their life knowledge and life experience, we pray that You'd have a special degree of mercy upon them to open their eyes and their hearts to the crucified and risen Christ that they might come to Him and trust Him for the forgiveness of sin and to be declared righteous in the presence of a holy God and to serve Him all of the days of their life henceforth and forevermore. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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