

**August 23, 2009**  
**Pentecost 12**  
**Philippians Sermon Series**

*“The Risen Lord Provides Faithful Leaders”*

**PHILIPPIANS 2:19-30**

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*I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. <sup>20</sup> I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. <sup>21</sup> For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup> But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. <sup>23</sup> I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. <sup>24</sup> And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon. <sup>25</sup> But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. <sup>26</sup> For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, <sup>30</sup> because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.*

I am holding in my hand a book, a very special book that was given to me by members and friends of this congregation last Sunday. You gave me this book to help me remember you and the 20 years of serving you in this congregation as your pastor. When I look at the pictures in this book and read the comments, I am made more fully aware of the love, and the support, and the prayers that you have given to me as your pastor.

This morning we think of the Apostle Paul, the prisoner in Rome. He deeply appreciated the love and support he received from other Christians. We think especially of a young pastor named Timothy and a leader in the church at Philippi named Epaphroditus. They were there for Paul when he needed help and encouragement, just as Paul had been there for them.

Isn't it amazing how our Lord Jesus Christ takes care of people in his church? Think of all the people Jesus has placed on the path of your life to support and strengthen you over all these years. Think of a pastor, maybe even a young pastor like Timothy who brought you the Word of God. Think of a Christian friend or a member of your congregation like Epaphroditus whom the Lord brought into your life to offer you strength and encouragement. This does not just happen by accident. Ephesians 4 says of our risen Lord and Savior, "It was he who gave some to be apostles, and some to be prophets, and some to be evangelists, and some to be teachers to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up."

**He provides faithful pastors like Timothy**

What a blessing it was for Paul to have Timothy with him while he was a prisoner in Rome with chains around his legs and guarded by Roman soldiers. Paul was willing to say goodbye to Timothy and to share him with the people in Philippi. He knew Timothy would do a good job of shepherding these people in God's Word. "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you." Notice Paul does not use the word "hope" the way we might say, "I hope I can get to the store before it closes." When Paul uses the word "hope" he is saying, "I am placing my hope in Jesus to have Timothy come to you soon." When your hope is in the Lord, you know that everything works according to his good plan and for his glory. Romans says, "We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." We have confidence we will see God's glory in the place he has prepared for us and also on this earth as everything works out according to his plan.

Paul was not afraid to send Timothy because he has seen Timothy in action as he brought God's Word to them. "I have no one else like him who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, but not those of Jesus Christ." Timothy had learned from Paul and from the example of Jesus to care for people the way a shepherd takes care of the flock of sheep. Do you see that sheep wandering off into a dangerous area where it might be attacked by a mountain lion? A faithful pastor reaches out to people with the Word of God to protect them from the dangers of sin and unbelief. Do you see that mountain meadow with the rich grass and fresh water? The faithful shepherd leads his people into the rich pastures of God's Word. That was Timothy. He was a young man who loved to bring people close to Jesus through the Word. In John 10 Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." It says of Jesus that he had compassion on people when he saw them as sheep without a shepherd. That's the kind of compassion that Timothy had for people. He learned this compassion from the Apostle Paul. Pray for faithful pastors like Timothy who are faithful to the Word and faithful in their care for people entrusted to them.

Paul was sure that Timothy could do the job of visiting the congregation in Philippi because Timothy had proved himself. "But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel." When I grew up on the farm, I recall helping my dad fix machinery. Often I was the one who handed him the right wrench or tool to complete the work. In the process I learned a little about fixing machinery. Paul was privileged to have Timothy working at his side like son. He saw how Timothy reacted to problems that came up in the lives of people, and how he addressed them with the Word of God. He heard how Timothy explained the life, and death, and resurrection of Jesus to people so they could believe and be saved. It was Paul who later wrote to Timothy these words about the gospel message they shared. "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners- of whom I am the worst."

In these last days in which we are living we need pastors, young, inexperienced pastors and older experienced pastors who have the same love for God's Word and for people that Paul and Timothy shared together. We need faithful pastors who open the Bible and believe every Word of the Bible is true. We need pastors who are able to say with Paul and Timothy, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ, for it is power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes." In Romans Paul wrote, "How, then can they call on

the one they have not believed in? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news?'

Read Paul's letters to Timothy and see how Paul does not hide the problems the Christians face in the churches. Listen to these chilling words from 2 Timothy chapter 4. "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear." Only in the Bible will you discover the truth of how far you have fallen short of God's glory because of sin. Only in the Bible will you find the truth of what's going to happen to us after we die, and the judgment that is coming. Only the Bible will you find Jesus as your only hope of being rescued as Jesus said so clearly, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to Father except through me." Jesus wants us to ask him to grant us faithful pastors like Timothy who hold to the Word of God in these last days.

### **He provides faithful leaders like Epaphroditus**

Paul was truly blessed to have Timothy at his side. He was also blessed to have a man with him from the congregation in Philippi by the name of Epaphroditus. "But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs." The Christians in Philippi sent this man Epaphroditus to travel 800 miles from Philippi to Rome. They wanted him to be there for Paul. What an interesting, perhaps even strange name, this was. Epaphroditus means blessed by Aphrodite. Aphrodite was the Greek goddess of love and good luck.

This man grew up with a heathen name which indicates he was born into a heathen home, but then he became a Christian who knew the higher love, the underserved love and kindness we have in Jesus. Paul wrote about this love that we get to know in Jesus earlier in this chapter when he spoke about Jesus who "Humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on the cross." In John 15 Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches." It is amazing how the Lord takes people like us who are nothing but old, dead sticks and then connects us to Christ. We become living branches. Everything Jesus did for us is ours. His blood cleanses us from the sin that condemns us. His perfect life becomes our perfect life. His death and resurrection is our death and resurrection. His new life is our new life. And when you come out of heathenism and are connected to Jesus as was the case with Epaphroditus, you start producing beautiful fruit in your life, fruit that brings joy to other people.

Epaphroditus, filled with love for Jesus, is there with Paul, offering him support and encouragement. Paul cannot say enough good about him. He calls him my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier. When we are taken out of heathenism and connected to Jesus we become branches connected to the vine, brothers and sisters in the Lord who genuinely care about each other. We pray for each other, we love each other, and we even fight like soldiers for the gospel of Jesus Christ, and for the truth of God's Word in these last days.

What impresses us about this man named Epaphroditus was his unselfish attitude that showed itself in everything he did. Paul writes, "For he longs for all of you and is distressed

because you heard he was ill. 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." We don't know what sickness he had but we do know from history that the marshes around Rome often bred mosquitoes that spread malaria. What we do know is that he is concerned that his dear Christian friends would worry about him, especially since he nearly died. He was more worried about others than he was about himself. Earlier in this chapter Paul had encouraged us to have a similar mindset when he wrote, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition, or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." I have met Christians who are genuinely more interested in hearing your story than telling you're their story. We need people who have this unselfish interest in others to encourage us and strengthen us in the Lord.

Here we are, ready to face another week of life here on this earth, filled with struggles for the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have so many people we know personally who need to be brought to Jesus, or brought closer to him. We know that Jesus is always in control of his church, and he will raise up people like Timothy who love the gospel and love God's Word, and people like Epaphroditus who love to encourage us as they think more of others than they do about themselves. When the Lord calls us, may we joyfully respond with Isaiah who said, "Here I am, send me, send me." Amen.