

Servants in Community

Thomas Robinson, *Lives Shaped by Jesus* 6, November 11, 2012

Philippians 2:19-30

¹⁹ I hope in (the) Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be heartened by knowing your welfare.

²⁰ For I have no one with a heart like his, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has been a servant at my side for the gospel.

²³ I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, ²⁴ and I trust in (the) Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

²⁵ I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger/apostle and minister to my need, ²⁶ for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed 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.

²⁸ I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. ²⁹ So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, ³⁰ for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what you could not do in your service to me.

Philippians 2:3-6, 12-13

³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty glory, but with **humility of thought** consider others even more valuable than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you **look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.** ⁵ **Think this** in yourselves, which also means **in Messiah Jesus,** ⁶ who *Though he was in the form of God ...*

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more **in my absence, work out your own salvation** with fear and trembling, ¹³ for **it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.**

Philippians 4:18

¹⁸ I have received everything in full and am in abundance. I am well supplied, having **received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent,** a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

Acts 16:1-3

¹ Paul came also to **Derbe** and to **Lystra.** A **disciple was there, named Timothy,** the son of a **Jewish woman** who was a **believer,** but his **father was a Greek.** ² He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. ³ **Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him,** and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴ As they went on their way through the cities....

2 Timothy 1:4-7

⁴ As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. ⁵ I am reminded of your **sincere faith,** a faith that dwelt first in **your grandmother Lois** and **your mother Eunice** and **now,** I am sure, **dwells in you as well.** ⁶ For this reason I remind you to **fan into flame the gift of God,** which is in you through the **laying on of my hands,** ⁷ for God gave us a **Spirit** not of fear but of **power and love and self-control.**

From Theology to Life Through Example

When you look at Paul's letter to former pagans and Jews together in a new community, its radical nature becomes clear. This is what bringing Jesus into their life has done. It remakes their understanding of God, of themselves, community life, the values of life, citizenship, death and fear, joy and the pursuit of happiness – everything.

He has taken them deep: to see abounding love as the source of knowledge and perception; to see how being in Christ removes the fear of death but also fills this life with joy, service, fulfillment, and delight; to live as citizens worthy of announcing a new Anointed King to the world and to count it grace to suffer for his sake in a community of love.

He has given them a hymn to articulate the new/old central story of God at the heart of the world revealed in Jesus: the self-giving God who humbles himself for us, takes our form and our suffering, gives himself to our obedience, suffers our death. This God seen in Jesus is the one and only God known in the scriptures. Jesus is God/LORD. Jesus is man. Jesus is Israel. The whole story converges. No one had seen God like that before.

But the problem with such deep/high theology: it can remain abstract. Paul calls them to work it out for themselves. But he also points to people who embody the transformation.

Timothy – Concerned for Your Welfare

Paul plans to send Timothy when he has news. Timothy embodies the kind of soul/heart created by the Gospel – concern for the Philippians, which is concern for Jesus. Timothy had been working with Paul for 5+ years and became Paul's most trusted emissary. He was from Lystra (Roman colony, Greek economy, ethnic Lycaonia), son of a Jewish mother and Greek father. He became a believer in Jesus along with his mother and grandmother. Paul & Barnabas were engulfed by Pagan ideas, conflict with other Jews, stoning. He knew what was at stake. When Paul returned with Silas, he joined them.

Timothy has been serving side with Paul, as a son/apprentice in this Gospel and the life it creates. He has internalized the loving concern for others, the proven dependability in the face of difficulty and opposition. He can help as they work out their salvation.

Paul can't come yet. He'll send one embodying the Gospel transformation they're learning

Epaphroditus – 'My Fellow Soldier, Your Apostle'

Epaphroditus ("Handsome") was the Philippians' emissary to Paul. They had tried to support Paul's work with money and gifts ever since he left them. But Epaphroditus raised their help to a new level. He brought money, but also energy, hard work, support in the face of dangerous opposition, when Paul was in prison. The shared life was real. The Philippians could not all come to Paul's aid, but they were embodied in Epaphroditus.

Ep.'s work led to suffering illness (injury?) that brought him near death. Paul praises God's mercy to himself in saving him from deep grief. Though Paul has no fear of death, note the intensity of emotion. Paul was no stoic withdrawn from feeling. Love and shared life make both joys and losses intense, even without fear. God is passionate. So are we.

Again, Paul highlights how Ep. embodied the story of Jesus in risking his life in service to others. He calls on the Philippians to honor such people: let his experience lead them.

We're all on the journey of learning to embody Jesus' story in our own lives. We take in the Gospel, God uses it to work in us, we meditate, repent, change our thinking, commit. We practice it with others around us, showing love, forgiveness, seeking ways to serve. We live it at work. We reach out to help others. God turns our lives to lights for others.