



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to everyone

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“The Way of Jesus Is People”
Philippians 2:19-30
Series: *Philippians for Friendship*
Healing Ministry

Welcome to our third investigation of Paul’s Letter to his friends at Philippi. Today we’re going to meet a couple of Paul’s better-known co-workers, and search our own lives for those who have helped us along the path of discipleship, if we have been on that path. And then I want to reflect with you about ministry here at APC, and some of the most exciting developments behind the scenes.

Open your Bibles to Philippians (just after “Ephesians” in the New Testament), and let’s quickly review what Paul has written so far. This is a document meant to be passed around among the several house-sized churches that Paul had started when he came to the Greek city of Philippi as an evangelist and church planter. His mission to Philippi had been a great success. A number of these people became disciples and even apostles, traveling with Paul or on their own missions to call people to new life in Jesus Christ. Of course, much has happened to Paul in the years following. He had made other missionary trips, and one time, going back to Jerusalem, he so angered the Jewish religious establishment that a riot started to grow in the City. That’s the last thing Rome wants—disturbing the peace was a way to get the authorities’ attention *right away*, attention you probably did not want. It could be a capital crime, because life was cheap out in the Roman provinces. While being arrested, Paul had asserted his Roman citizenship and its right to a hearing by Caesar in Rome. So after his arrest, he was taken with others on a long trip to Rome, and put in prison there until his case should come up.

While in prison in about A.D. 61-63, Paul has been working just as hard as he was when he was free. He has been talking to all the prison staff about Jesus, and they all know he’s in chains because of the Master. More than that, the Christians already in Rome have been bringing him food and supplies—since the Romans did not feed their prisoners, but they depending on friends and family to keep them alive. As Paul has been meeting with these local Christians, and they have seen his ministry while in prison, they also have been inspired to be much more bold in talking to people they know about Jesus, and the ministry in Rome *outside the jail* has been growing, too.

The last part of chapter one is remarkable. Paul has been getting the sense that he might not win his case and be set free. But he is not upset by that. In fact, he has come to the place where he could live or die happily. “To live is Christ, and to die is gain,” he wrote. Either way—he WINS!

In chapter two, he addresses his friends at Corinth directly. Keep growing up, he says. Do what Jesus did, God’s own Son who lowered himself to become human, lowered himself further to become a servant of others, and lowered himself to the utmost by obeying his Father

and embracing the Cross and all its shame of dying naked out in public, slandered as a criminal against the State. Because of his faithfulness, God raised Jesus from the dead and gave him the Name that is above every name, so at the Name of Jesus, every knee shall bow—whether on earth or in heaven or even under the earth—and every creature will affirm Jesus Christ is Lord, and praise the Father Who has made all this possible. If we keep moving in that direction—it’s not automatic, it is a daily, a moment-by-moment choice which we need to do with each other’s help—if we keep moving in that direction we shall indeed be the Light of the World, as Jesus called us in his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew.

Now, starting with verse 19 of chapter 2, Paul is thinking out loud (on parchment) again about how he can best bless his friends at Philippi. Listen with me for God’s Word TO US TODAY, as I read these words aloud. *[text]*

Remember the old slogan for Hallmark cards—“When you care enough to send the very best”? That is what Paul wants to do, to send his best to assist his friends at Philippi to “continue to work out their salvation” (verses 12-13). First, he thinks of Timothy. Tim is Paul’s right-hand man. He has brought Timothy to faith, and Tim has excelled so much that Paul has taken him on as a partner in ministry, even though he is quite a bit younger than many in the movement. He is thinking about sending Tim for a while, and then Tim would return to bring Paul more news—remember, this is the only way Paul can stay connected to the churches he has left behind.

Tim had been a part of one of the churches at Philippi, and Paul had put him in charge as he was leaving to plant the Kingdom of Christ elsewhere. So Tim knows the Philippians well, and (as Paul says), Tim cares deeply for “y’all.” The word Paul uses says, “Tim worries about you like no one else.” That’s a huge qualification—no wonder Paul has thought of Timothy first.

But there’s more. Tim has proven himself through ministry with Paul. He is utterly dependable. So when Paul says, “I have no one like him”, it’s quite a compliment. *He’s my best guy; I’m sending you my best.*

Most everyone is fully focused on themselves, Paul writes. We might call that “self-absorbed”, or “narcissistic”. That’s the basic sin of all of us; we don’t go to God first, before we start making our own decisions and plans. That’s the one and only ‘original sin’. But Tim is different. He has become what Paul calls elsewhere, “conformed to Christ”. Tim is one of those rare people who live like Jesus, who was “the man for others”, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer called him.

OK, as soon as Paul knows how things are going for him with his case there in Rome, he’ll send Tim. But in the meantime, (verse 25), I want to send back to you Epaphroditus. If Paul called Timothy his “son”, he calls “Eppie” is brother, his co-worker, his “fellow soldier”.

Epaphroditus had come from Philippi to bring gifts to Paul from them, and to be helpful in any other way he could. But travel in those days was really hard; disease was rampant, and cures were few. Much the same could be said of Roman prisons. Apparently the journey by ship had left Eppie wasted to the point where he almost died. Paul had been worried over him—which made the gifts of the Philippians even more valuable to him; it almost cost Eppie his life. By sending Epaphroditus back to them, they will get a chance to see that indeed he had been spared by God, and Paul will know that he’s going to be safer and healthier back at home.

It's as though Paul is emptying out his treasure chest and sending his best to the Philippians--Tim AND Eppie! Doesn't that show us how dear these people are to Paul?

Now I'd like to stop for a moment with you, and invite you to think about one or two people who have been that valuable to you. Have you had someone who was a father, brother, co-worker (or, mother or sister) to you? Who comes to mind? . . .

Is there anyone who has inspired you to live more like Jesus? THAT would be someone even more valuable, helping you listen to God and develop your own ministries that bring people out of darkness and into the light of God's love in the church!

On our Leadership Retreat in June, we asked our leaders to name people who live in a way that makes them think of Jesus. . . . Some listed members of their family. Some listed one or more of our current or former Session members, or another church leader. Several listed Bessie Eichorn, who moved to Redding recently, and I'd have to agree. Can you think of someone who makes you think of Jesus? How much do you want people to see Jesus through you? Our "job #1" as a church is to grow you (if you are willing) to be more like Jesus.

That's what I'm trying to do in a number of ways—personally, and as one of our church's leaders. Just as Paul depended on these men to multiply his own ministry, I am raising up some of our men and women to multiply the ministry God has given me, among you--and beyond us into this community. I am trying to be that "father", that "brother", that "co-worker", that "fellow soldier obeying General Jesus".

And I love to hear the stories of specific progress toward this goal. I love to hear how one of you is growing your salvation, your love for our Lord, your passion and effectiveness for ministry. I love to hear how our WOW youth group is growing, and how excited our leaders are. I love to hear how one of my discipleship groups is ready to multiply—again. I love to talk with someone outside our church—this week, there were two different younger men—and one of the two has not only kept the faith in the years since I last knew him, but God has been growing him, painfully at times, to a level of enthusiasm and maturity that left tears in my eyes.

Discipleship—multiplying the ministry—is the central focus of my Doctor of Ministry project, too. And I have more and more to write about, so I'd better get this paper done soon, or (by God's grace) it will never end!

Finally, I want to share one more thing, even though it's still quite early and I don't know how well it will come out. Some of you have heard me talk about Toby Nelson, who has preached here—and also about Paul Bridges, who has also preached here. These two guys have become partners for planting a new church in Penn Valley/Lake Wildwood. Now I have talked with three other Presbyterian pastors in this area, and they are all interested in seeing what can be done to encourage and support this project together with us. The four of us have even identified some money our churches should be able to use for this purpose, and have lots of ideas—including sharing youth ministry—that would build ALL our churches. Paul and Toby committed themselves this week to make this ministry succeed. I can hardly stand it! Like Paul and Timothy and Epaphroditus, we serve our Lord's interests together.

Through spiritually-gifted people in our Church Family, with you and among you, we are raising men and women to know and love and listen and obey God's voice, to develop their own

ministries (often with others), and to begin to take some risks so that more people come to love God, too. But we are after more than salvation. We are after growing people up to maturity, fruitfulness, and multiplication. We want to become parents to a whole ‘nother “ring” of people—to have “grandchildren” who will themselves grow to reproduce with this same DNA—the “Jesus Gene”, if you will. We want to have people we can think of as our “sons” or “daughters”, who are having children of their own, all assisted by you, all enjoyed by you, all encouraged by you. Because God has shown us repeatedly, and Paul is showing us now in his letter, *the way of Jesus IS PEOPLE*.

May our church be as full of love as these Philippian congregations, producing faithful followers of Jesus Christ in our time.

(INTRO TO HEALING MINISTRY)

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on July 12, 2009, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]