

# [ for example ]

## :: philippians 2.25-30 ::

We have a great text this morning as we look at verse 25 of Philippians chapter 2:

**Philippians 2.25 -Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need;**

There is a ton of stuff in this verse and we don't have time to look at everything. One thing that is worth meditating upon is this continual idea we've been seeing of how all the characters in this epistle are constantly thinking of others, not only *more* than themselves, but others completely *above* and *instead of* themselves.

I just want to pause on this for a moment because it's such a strong theme in this book. And it's this mindset that propels a person forward in their walk with Christ. If Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and then to love your neighbor as yourself, then looking within we should find a mindfulness of others. Not perfectly, but evidently. This has been the focus of many of the verses in these 2 chapters that we've made it through. The personal application of the calling we have to love God and to love others.

In our text this morning, we get more insight into what it means to walk a life with Jesus, what it means to actually live out the Christian life, where our Christianity is not an adjective but a verb. We're given the example of Epaphroditus, who Paul has some remarkable things to say about not only here, but to the end of the chapter.

So much of God's word is example to us. When we think of the famous Bible characters, we immediately remember specific stories and instances that have been preserved for us as an example of either what **to** do or what **not** to do in our efforts to follow the Lord.

If an angel comes and tells you something is going to happen that you think isn't very probable, here's what **NOT** to do...

If your government sets up an image and commands you to worship it, here's what you **SHOULD** do...

If you're on your rooftop and you see a woman bathing in her house, here's what **NOT** to do...

Examples.

Even Jesus used examples to teach both His disciples and the multitudes while He was on the earth. He used parables. Similes. Metaphors. These sorts of illustrations, and the historical

cases we find in the Bible are intended by God to teach us things about our life here on the earth and our relationship with Him.

This morning, since we are men who desire to love God and live out our calling as disciples, our example is Epaphroditus, the Philippian Christian.

He had been sent by the church in Philippi to bring Paul financial support after hearing that he was imprisoned in Rome and awaiting trial. Not only that, but he was also charged with attending to Paul and serving him. This is a job that was incredibly dangerous and risky. Because, not only was travel unbelievably difficult in that era, but he was going to stand with a man who was on trial with the possibility of capital punishment. A person who stood beside such a prisoner was, of course, in great danger of being sentenced alongside them. In fact, Paul even points out that in his first trial, everyone deserted him and none stood with him because of the danger that it would've meant.

But now, the church had sent Epaphroditus to support and serve and stand with Paul. Now, some time later, here's what we see.

Paul says in verse 25:

**Philippians 2.25 - Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need;**

Paul was sending his Philippian friend back home to serve the church who had sent him out.

Many scholars believe that Epaphroditus was the person who transcribed this letter as Paul dictated it and then delivered it to the church once he arrived back home.

Paul used some interesting words to describe this man, words that we can learn from and apply to our own hearts today.

First, Paul called him a brother.

Brotherhood is one of the closest bonds we find between people on the earth. It's a relationship that surpasses many, many others because within 2 people there is a connection and commonality that isn't shared with many others. There is an understanding that almost every culture has that family kinship, brotherhood, is something unbreakable and eternal. It's something unconditional. At least that is how we think of brotherhood in the ideal sense.

Obviously, families have falling outs from time to time. But we have this innate understanding that we share blood with our brothers and that blood is thicker than water and all those sorts of sentiments that we've heard before. There's a powerful connection and alliance there.

And that is what a Christian is to other Christians. Brothers. We've been blood-bought into the family of God and made into children of His Kingdom. And so, first, as Christians, we are called into that sort of care and alliance with other believers that brothers have. Where we cherish each other not because of what someone *does* but because of who they *are* because of Jesus. We talked about that Christian relationship last week.

Second, Paul called him a fellow worker.

We've not only been called into a **family**, we've also been called into the **field**. There's work to be done planting and cultivating and harvesting seed. Unfortunately, Jesus pointed out that:

**Luke 10.2a - [Jesus] said to them, "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few."**

Epaphroditus had stepped out as a disciple and actually followed. He had volunteered himself to be sent on behalf of God's work.

It is an interesting thing to look at the Gospels and notice the multitudes. There were always a mix of people around Jesus. There was the 12. There were other disciples who weren't part of the 12. There were the scribes and Pharisees and then there were the multitudes. They weren't evil people in the sense that they weren't anti-Christ like the Pharisees were, but they also weren't disciples. They were people who wanted to hear Jesus, wanted to receive things *from* Jesus, but hadn't stepped forward to follow Jesus. They weren't among the disciples doing the work of the Kingdom.

I would suggest that this category of people continues in the Church today. Those who come to hear. They listen to the word of God. But then, when the day is done, they rise and leave and choose not to follow the Lord as He leads them. They are otherwise distracted by the world, otherwise inclined or occupied. They assume that *someone* will work the field but take little or no part in it themselves.

In our text Paul is not only commending Epaphroditus, but he is pointing out the example of what a Christian really is and what a Christian really does. We're called to **listen AND to labor**, to a **family AND a field**.

And then third, Paul called him a soldier. We're called to a **family**, we're called to a **field** and we're called to a **fight**.

A soldier has two major directives: to defend and to advance. In the Scriptures we are called to defend the Gospel, to defend our hearts, to defend the hope we have within us, to defend Christian liberty and to defend our fellow believers. There are adversaries out there and we are equipped and positioned to withstand attack and shield others from spiritual harm. This is a high calling, but one that is catastrophic if ignored. The spiritual well-being of other Christians is something that we must be mindful of in our day to day following of Christ.

But also, a soldier is charged with advancing and gaining ground. To defend is needful, but we shouldn't lay down our swords. Instead, we should think spiritually like Saul's son Jonathan, who was always looking for opportunity to strike forward and gain ground for the Lord. Using God's word and the power of the Spirit, we should be pushing further in steps of faith, seeing where God might grant us opportunities to win souls or establish new spiritual work. We are soldiers in active duty. It's combat duty on a battlefield where lives are being lost every day. We need to fight forward in faith, defending against the world and the attacks of the devil, gaining ground as God grants us victory, bringing souls into eternity as the Spirit moves through us. This is the nature of our warfare and we are called to the fight.

These were the 3 main descriptors that Paul used to describe Epaphroditus, our example. Then he adds two more roles that he filled.

First, he was a messenger. As Christians, we understand that God has made us brothers, He's made us workers, He's made us soldiers, but He's also given us a specific message to deliver to specific people to whom He sends us.

If we are unfamiliar with the message, then we will find a great gap between what God wants for us and what we find in our lives. Imagine a man coming to your door. He has a telegram for you. He knows that the contents of the telegram will have a bearing on the rest of your life. In fact, he says that the telegram has information that will determine whether you live or whether you die. But then, when you ask him what the message is, he doesn't know. Worse, he doesn't even read it to you.

This is the picture of the silent Christian who refuses to let their light shine. We are people with a message that is meant to be delivered.

Then, finally, Epaphroditus acted as a minister to Paul. Again we see the theme of humble service and putting others before self. Epaphroditus became terribly sick while in Rome. Some commentators speculate that he fell victim to the commonplace Roman Fever which many foreign visitors contracted. But still, he chose to serve. He chose to lay down self and build where God had placed him. He chose to focus his attention on the needs of the ministry so that God might be glorified.

This is our example today.

These sort of heroic virtues are not reserved for a handful of super-disciples. This is the spiritual potency that God wants for each of us. You the brother. You the worker. You the soldier. You the messenger. You the minister. You the man that God transforms and builds up to glorify Himself and benefit this world. This is the Christian man in Christ Jesus. To realize this sort of strength is as simple as laying down self, taking up the Gospel and setting our eyes on Jesus, who leads us day by day into the path of His abundance and completion.