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Sermon Notes

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Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus: Role Models of Faithful Service

Philippians 2:19-30

I. Unsung Heroes of Church History

- A. My Great Attraction to Church History
- B. My Continuing Discipleship... the ongoing need for mentors
- C. Unsung Heroes
 - 1. Everyone knows Paul... Timothy came after him
 - 2. Even more obscure, Epaphroditus
 - 3. Invaluable ministries

II. Respecting Timothy's Proven Dedication (vs. 19-24)

vs. 19-24 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. 20 I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. 21 For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 22 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. 23 I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. 24 And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

- A. Timothy's Awesome Burden: Following Paul in the Ministry
 - 1. Recurring theme: Picking up where the master left off
 - a. patriarchs in the Old Testament: Abraham to Isaac, Isaac to Jacob, Jacob to Joseph
 - b. Moses and Joshua

Numbers 11:28 Joshua son of Nun... had been Moses' aide since youth

Numbers 27:18-20 So the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him. Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him.

Joshua 1:1-7 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them-- to the Israelites. ... "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. 7 Be strong and very courageous.

c. David and Solomon

1 Chronicles 22:5-6 David said, "My son Solomon is young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the LORD should be of great magnificence and fame and splendor in the sight of all the nations. Therefore I will make preparations for it." So David made extensive preparations before his death. Then he called for his son Solomon and charged him to build a house for the LORD, the God of Israel.

d. Elijah and Eilshah

1 Kings 19:19 So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him.

2. Recurring theme in Church History

a. Augustine and Eraclius

Four years before he died, he had handed over the administrative duties of the church in Hippo to his assistant Eraclius. At the ceremony Eraclius stood to preach, as the old man sat on his bishop's throne behind him. Overwhelmed by a sense of inadequacy in Augustine's presence, Eraclius said, **"The cricket chirps, the swan is silent."**

b. Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon

In life, Luther had been the unquestioned leader to the Lutheran Reformation; the quiet scholarly Melancthon his right-hand man;

Melancthon said of Luther, **"I would rather die than be separated from this man."**

But at Luther's death, this quiet scholar became THE spokesman for the German Reformation... it was an overwhelming burden. Melancthon wrote:

"After Luther was called away from this mortal life, I have now besides pain even more work and worries."

c. John Calvin and Theodore Beza

The Great Reformer died in Geneva at the moment of sunset. Theodore Beza who had been chosen to follow Calvin commented:

“Thus in the same moment that day the sun set and the greatest light which was in this world, for the direction of the church of God, was withdrawn to Heaven. We can well say that with this single man it has pleased God, in our time, to teach us the way both to live well and to die well. “

d. William Carey and the young missionary at his funeral

On June 9, 1834, William Carey left this earth at the age of 73. Once he left England he never returned to his homeland. At his death he had requested the words of an Isaac Watts hymn be written on his tombstone: "A wretched, poor, and helpless worm, On Thy kind arms I fall." A young missionary who attended the funeral wrote these words:

" And what shall we do? God has take up our Elijah to heaven ... But we must not be discouraged. The God of missions lives forever. His Cause must go on ... With our departed leader all is well. He had finished his course gloriously. But the work now descends on us."

e. G. Campbell Morgan and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones at Westminster Chapel

On July 18, 1943, G. Campbell Morgan resigned as pastor of Westminster Chapel, handing over the reins to Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. In his resignation letter, he wrote: "I have to place in your hands my resignation, to take effect at the end of August. It is not an easy thing to do... On John Wesley's monument in the Abbey the words are found, 'God buries His workmen, but carries on His work.'"

That's exactly right: 'God buries His workmen, but carries on His work.'

God uses us and then takes us home... but his work is not dependent on any human servant

1 Corinthians 3:6-7 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

1 Peter 1:24-25 For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever."

So it was in the case of Paul and Timothy. Timothy was being groomed to take Paul's place:

2 Timothy 2:1-2 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

B. Timothy's Careful Grooming for Success in Ministry

1. Evangelized and trained by his mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois

2. Father was of no effect spiritually: a Greek who gets no further mention in the Bible

Acts 16:1-4 He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. 2 The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. 3 Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ... [and] they traveled from town to town

3. Paul adopted him... in effect adopted him

1 Timothy 1:2 To Timothy my true son in the faith

Greek word = children born in wedlock, true born, legitimate, actual... word also can mean genuine

It is clear from this expression that Paul considered him the same as a son

In the ancient Romans world, legal adoption was a common practice... we see it in the movie Ben-Hur, in which Judah Ben-Hur becomes the adopted heir of Quintus Arius

However, it is not so much that Timothy is the legal heir of Paul... but rather that Paul thought of him like a son in the faith

4. Apprenticeship: "Like father, like son"

vs. 22 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.

Ultimate discipleship relationship: father and son

The son grows up in his father's house and learns his father's trade firsthand

Christ himself alluded to this kind of a relationship with His Father:

John 5:16-20 So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. 17 Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." 18 For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. 19 Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. 20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.

5. Daily discipleship

- a. walking along the road, talking together about the Lord and His work
- b. opportunities for ministry presented themselves constantly

- c. Timothy learned by watching Paul's life and by listening to Paul's instructions

Application: Father's train your sons IN THE FAITH

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Paul had this kind of time with Timothy... opportunities to teach and to learn in everyday life settings

- 6. Opportunities to prove himself
 - a. Paul entrusted important tasks to Timothy
 - b. Timothy thus became an "approved workman"

C. Timothy's Qualities for Success in Ministry

- 1. Rare and Genuine Interest in the Welfare of God's People
 - a. "genuine interest in your welfare"

The word "genuine" means "truly" interested... its unfeigned, to the core of his being

"interest" is usually translated "be anxious" Timothy is genuinely concerned, anxious, watchful over their spiritual welfare... it really matters to him whether or not they are succeeding

- b. RARE:

"I have no one else like him..." "For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ"

Literally says "I have no one else LIKE MINDED"... of the same spirit as me

Timothy was a kindred spirit to Paul, deeply concerned about the spiritual welfare of the churches they planted

Paul comments on how RARE that was

- c. most people are SELF-CENTERED... Timothy is concerned about Christ and Christ's people
- 2. Proven Loyalty and Dedication to the Great Commission
 - a. implied: Timothy lives for Christ's interests... not his own
 - i) Christ's interests: the Glory of God in the salvation of His sheep... the building of the Kingdom one soul at a time; the building up of God's people to full maturity... Christ was single-minded

ii) Paul was also single-minded on this matter

Acts 20:24 However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

iii) Timothy thinks every day about Christ, His Kingdom, His people, His interests

b. stated: Timothy is tested and approved

vs. 22 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.

Unlike John Mark, Timothy did not cut and run when things got difficult

Timothy stayed by Paul's side, displaying loyalty and courage

The word "proved" means someone who has stood the test, tested by the fires of experience

1 Peter 1:7 These have come so that your faith-- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

3. Good Reputation Among Believers

Paul says "YOU KNOW" his proven character... you saw it yourself... you observed it, and you know the quality of this man

Thus Timothy has a GOOD REPUTATION among believers

This is vital for successful ministry... we build up a reputation, and it doesn't come easily

Proverbs 22:1 A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.

A successful ministry will be based on the development of a reputation of godly character as observed over a period of time

"Preaching is truth delivered through personality." Philips Brooks

This is a famous observation on preaching; it is based on the incarnation of Christ; God wants His truth proclaimed by men with a history, men who have built up a reputation through their daily lives; men who have sealed their doctrines by their lifestyles

Timothy has built up a reputation among the Philippians, and they can trust him

4. Servant's Heart

vs. 22 *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.*

Finally, we notice Timothy's servant heart... he, like Paul, considers himself a bond-slave for Christ Jesus

III. Honoring Epaphroditus's Courageous Gamble (vs. 25-30)

vs. 25-30 *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. 26 For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. 27 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. 28 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. 29 Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, 30 because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.*

A. Epaphroditus's Dangerous Mission

1. Epaphroditus was the messenger who had brought the gift to Paul from the Philippians
2. This was dangerous work, because of robbers who could attack him on the highway
3. It was also dangerous work because the Romans might arrest anyone who identified themselves with Paul... just to show up and try to help Paul might be worthy of imprisonment
4. As it turned out, the journey resulted in a different kind of threat to Epaphroditus's life... illness... and back in those days, illness very often resulted in death
5. Perhaps the illness was caught from being with Paul in a filthy prison... we have no way of knowing

B. Epaphroditus's Courageous Gamble

1. He knew ahead of time the great risks involved in this dangerous mission
2. He counted the cost and was willing to risk his life for the cause of the gospel
3. "Risk" = "gamble"

vs. 30 *...he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.*

Risk = losing some earthly benefit... earthly wealth, earthly ease or comfort, earthly reputation, earthly health, earthly life itself

NO RISK when it comes to heavenly benefits!

Matthew 6:20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

4. No progress can be made for Christ's advancing Kingdom by those who love their earthly lives too much to risk

John 12:24-26 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. 25 The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

C. Epaphroditus's Rewards

1. Honor from men

vs. 29-30 Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, 30 because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

- a. Paul says it is right to give honor to people like Epaphroditus
- b. earthly honor from other Christians is a strong encouragement both to the individual and to the whole church to excel and be fruitful for Christ
- c. WARNINGS: honors should recognize God's grace in the achievement; honors should not be done in an earthly way; earthly honors should NOT be the goal of our service; honors should not be a source of jealousy among the church

2. Honor from God

John 12:26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

This is the highest treasure a child of God can receive... praise from God!!

IV. Understanding Paul's Real Struggles

A. Paul's Earthly Hope in a Life of Heavenly-Mindedness

vs. 19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you.

vs. 23 I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me.

1. Paul's simple hope and desire: to send Timothy as a messenger between Paul and his church
 - a. we live in an age in which communication is instant and assumed
 - b. missionaries in the 19th century were almost completely cut off from communication

It took Adoniram Judson, missionary in Burma, sometimes as much as two years to receive an answer to a letter he would mail home

Even in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, communication was a problem: Lottie Moon was starving herself during a famine in China and was almost dead before anyone knew about it

Nowadays we can follow events on the mission field almost as soon as they happen

In the first century, communication was a great problem

So Paul used Timothy as a messenger to give and receive news between him and the churches he'd planted

In the same way the Philippian church had used Epaphroditus as their messenger

2. Desire: to be cheered by news of the Philippians spiritual health
 - a. "cheered" gives insight into Paul's joy...
 - b. there is an untouchable aspect: an unshakeable Kingdom, a reward protected in heaven
 - c. there is a vulnerable aspect of Paul's joy: the progress of the churches he planted
 - d. what the Apostle John said, Paul could say:

3 John 3-4 *It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*

1 Thessalonians 3:6-9 *But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. 7 Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. 8 For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. 9 How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?*

- e. Paul's deepest desire: the glory of God in the health and grow of Christ's Church

B. Paul's Anxiety in a Life of Faith

1. the flip side: greatest burden to a suffering minister of the gospel: fear that it was all a waste of time, that the suffering has been for nothing
2. Paul constantly reflects this burden in his letters

1 Thessalonians 3:5 For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent [Timothy] to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.

2 Corinthians 11:28-29 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

Galatians 4:19-20 My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!

3. Later Paul will command the Philippians to get rid of all anxiety

Philippians 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

4. But here he betrays great anxiety over the Philippian church and Epaphroditus

Philippians 2:20 I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare.

Literally, “I have no one else who is like-minded with me, who is genuinely anxious and deeply concerned about your welfare”

Philippians 2:28 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.

In these two verses we see a glimpse into the anxieties of Paul in ministry: anxiety over the spiritual welfare of churches he planted

C. Paul’s Sorrow in a Life of Joy

1. Philippians is rightly called an “Epistle of Joy”... because of the number of times that Paul displays or commands joy

Philippians 1:18 And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice

Philippians 2:17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.

Philippians 2:18 So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

Philippians 3:1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!

Philippians 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Philippians 4:10 I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me.

2. Paul will later talk about the secret of contentment in “any and every circumstance”

Philippians 4:11 ... I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

3. HOWEVER... for all of that, Paul as great deal of sorrow in his life... and reading between the lines and adding other verses we can see how sorrow in a life of joy is actually a mark of spiritual maturity

Philippians 2:27 Indeed [Epaphroditus] 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.

Hmmm... “Sorrow upon sorrow” implies that Paul was undergoing sorrow in his life

The outward appearance was that Paul was blissful and serene all the time without any effort, without any pangs, without even the slightest motion of sadness or sorrow...

THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE IN THIS WORLD

Christ never experienced that... joy absolutely unmixed with sorrow

Isaiah 53:3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.

John 12:27 "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.

Luke 12:50 But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!

Rather, Christian joy is from looking beyond immediate sorrow to eternal benefits:

Hebrews 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Thus Paul’s paradoxical attitude is summed up in this one verse:

2 Corinthians 6:10 sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything

Thus Christian joy is not some “ostrich” joy with the head in the sand not facing realities

If your three-year-old is just diagnosed with leukemia, the last thing you need is a fake Christian joy that says in effect, “Don’t worry, be happy!” “Rejoice in the Lord always!”

What makes Christian joy is this: **sorrowful, yet always rejoicing**

Because our sufferings are producing something marvelous in the end:

Why? 2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

D. Paul's Weakness in a Life of Power

1. Few people have ever led such a POWERFUL life as the Apostle Paul
 - a. he did powerful miracles
 - b. he had powerful visions of Christ
 - c. he wrote powerful letters that changed the course of earthly history and resulted in eternal salvation for countless millions
 - d. his preaching had a powerful impact on individuals, whole cities, whole nations, even a whole empire: the Roman empire
 - e. Paul's courage in the shipwreck and in riots and beatings was more evidence of his life of power

2. However, Paul here is a picture of powerlessness... of dependency and weakness
 - a. weak and dependent on other Christians like the Philippians for money for food and clothing
 - b. weak and dependent on Timothy and Epaphroditus for news and business with the outside world
 - c. weak and dependent on his captors for the possibility of his death or release from chains

vs. 19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you.

vs. 23 I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me.

Paul doesn't know whether he will live or die; he doesn't know if he will even be allowed to send Timothy as his messenger...

"I HOPE to send Timothy"

3. This was THE central lesson of Paul's life of suffering in sanctification

- a. this powerful Pharisee, so in control of his career and his destiny
- b. used to being the one in charge of everything
- c. totally dependent on God and on other people for the smallest matters of his life

2 Corinthians 1:8-9 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

V. Application

A. Honor Godly Role Models

- 1. Timothy's proven dedication: serving like a son with his father in the gospel work
- 2. Epaphroditus's courageous gamble: willing to risk earthly ease, health, even life itself for the gospel
- 3. Paul: so genuine, so faithful, so trusting

B. Learn True Christian Inner Life

- 1. "Sorrowful, but always rejoicing"
- 2. Anxious, but not about EARTHLY benefits
- 3. Facing a genuine sorrow and grieving over it... but finding joy in the middle of it

C. Risk More for Christ

- 1. "Risk" : earthly things CAN be lost when we faithfully serve Christ
- 2. A Protected Life is NOT worth living

John 12:24-26 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. 25 The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

D. Live for the Reward of Honor from God

John 12:26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.