

A Few Good Men [sermon notes] Phil 2:19-29

Report time – tell some old report stories. Always the surprise of those who had done no work and messed around – self denial.

Appraisals at work.

Biggest pleasure is when someone is being successful.

If God was to produce a report on you now what do you think HE would say? Would it be excellent – or not good enough – perhaps we would be in denial, perhaps it would be all excuses.

This passage continues a series of ideas in Philippians about how we as God's people should serve Him.

Early part of chapter dealt with our own relationships – let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus then Paul considered his own service – I am poured out like a drink offering.

Now he comes to two men that were with him that he hoped to send back to Philippi – Timothy and Epaphroditus. Timothy we know a good bit about him. He was one of Paul's closest friends and confidants. Epaphroditus - Paul had got to know because he had come to Rome from Philippi and got ill – sounded serious and they had enjoyed each other's company for some time and Paul obviously thought highly of him.

Paul speaks highly of these men and holds them up as examples of what Christian service is all about.

● **Timothy**

So what of Timothy? *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.*

I have no-one else like him – that' s an astonishing thing to say because Paul commended many men and women, but it is only of Timothy that he says “I have no-one like him”. An outstanding man. Why?

Was it his eloquent preaching?

Was it his anointing?

Was it the way that he prayed?

Was it his sound doctrine?

Was it the number of times he went to church.

NO – Paul commends him because he took a genuine interest in their welfare. Wow! His uniqueness and his spirituality were determined because he took an interest in them and he was prepared to commit himself to them.

Just a minute I hear you say, what about his commitment to Christ? Isn't it a bit strange that there is nothing "spiritual" about caring for their welfare. Verse 21 helps us here.

For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

Why did Paul commend Timothy – because he looked after the welfare of the people of God, which were the interests of Jesus Christ.

What characterises the Church of God in Britain in this 21st Century is that each man, each woman looks after their own interests. That is the measure of this society.

The Supermarket - everyone pushes their trolley around irrespective of anyone else.

And that is the measure of the Church, this Church. People working with the ulterior motive of themselves, their interests, their ambitions, their ideas, their spiritual prejudices. All churches suffer from it. Our church suffers from it.

We are God's people, this is His Church, His work – these are the interests of Jesus Christ. This passage stands as an encouragement and a warning to anybody engaged in God's service or ministry in the Church - deacons, those leading any ministry, those serving in any ministry however lowly. You are here to do the work of Jesus Christ – not to follow YOUR interests.

Not to follow YOUR ideas of how a Church should be run, and goodness knows there are enough people who will give us their ideas.

You are here to serve the interests of Jesus Christ. Look at the example of Timothy – he took a genuine interest in the welfare of the Philippians – not a professional interest, not an interest in what he was obliged to do, not an interest in the people that agreed with him, or not an interest that suited him – he took a genuine interest in ALL of them.

If we want to see the work of God advance forward in this Church, I believe that we must put aside our dogmas, our selfish ambitions, our favourite ideas, our selves and serve the interests of Jesus Christ – to serve His purposes, and that will always be based around the spiritual needs of God's people – the ones already in the fold, and those that God is bringing into the fold as we go forward in mission. The quality of our church will be determined by this.

We need to be asking ourselves - are the interests of **Jesus Christ** being served by this. We are coming to some biggish decisions and are already engaging in much more witness. How does this serve the interests of ?Jesus Christ.

How does my presence in this serve the interests of Jesus Christ? Am I in it because I perceive its His will that I should serve. Or am I in it because I think I can show everybody that I can do a better job than anyone else.

Am I in it because I can organise efficiently? Efficient organisation is good but a waste of space if the interests of Jesus Christ are not being served.

That's the challenge.

It gets worse when we come to Epaphroditus.

● **Epaphroditus**

Here was a man who came to deliver a letter and got ill. Interesting story this one as God chooses not to heal him. Instead he gets an extended stay in Rome. We know it was a long time because there was enough time to get a message to Philippi and back in the meanwhile which would have taken months.

What was Epaphroditus' response to their worry and concern. Was he pleased that he took an interest in him. Glad he wasn't forgotten? What a pity he was laid up for months. Why was he the one to go to Rome – people wouldn't benefit from his presence and his ministry.

Paul says this:

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.

He couldn't wait to get back because he was concerned for the worry HE had caused THEM! Here was a man who put his fellow saints before his own welfare. But it gets even worse.

Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour 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.

He almost died in their service to get to see Paul and deliver a letter with their help (money, clothes). I guess for many of us, to die in the service of the Lord is something we would entertain. How many potential martyrs here this morning?

But Epaphroditus wasn't a potential martyr here – he was a man so devoted to the people of God at Philippi and to Paul, that he was prepared to risk his health getting a message through.

He risked his life for the people of God. Who is prepared to die for the people of God here this morning. Who is prepared to serve the Lord for the benefit

of God' s people here. Astonishing but that is what Epaphroditus was prepared to do. He didn' t call out for miraculous healing and quote some scripture about God healing all his sicknesses – he was quite ready to die if it meant getting that message through. What devotion!

We have come to this kind of position in other passages in the Word of God. The quality of our spiritual lives is determined by the quality of our relationships with others – how far are we prepared to go to serve the purposes of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Are we prepared to die for them – not as martyrs – but just because we put their needs and them first.

New leaders, God has called you to leadership in this Church. A Church is not a building, it' s not even an organisation, its a body of people. The Lord is calling you to be a Timothy, to be an Epaphroditus for the people of God here in Woodberry Down this morning – to be prepared to die not as martyrs, but people prepared to risk their health, life and limb for the interests of Jesus Christ, and those interests are the people God has given you leadership over.

The quality of leadership relies not on how sound you are, how good your ideas of worship are, how capable of planning the church programme, how great a pray-er you are. All these things have merit – but if you want to be a really great leader – then you seek the welfare of God' s people above all things, even your life. Yes and that includes the person who is awkward, who you can' t stand the sight of, who objects to how things are done – all of them – you risk your life for all of them. Because that is what the nature of Christian leadership is above all things and that is what you are called to be – it' s the bottom line.



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