

We're finishing up chapter 2 today in our study on the book of Philippians. We're half-way done, if you can believe it. And the passage for today is unique. It's a bit of a break from Paul's theological eloquence, as he takes a few moments here to speak very plainly and practically about the people involved in keeping this relationship between Paul and the Philippians going.

But before we get there, let's just do a quick recap again so that we remember where Paul has taken us. And for today, we'll do this fill in the blank style.

At the very beginning of the letter, Paul says that he and Timothy are _____ for Christ? Slaves. Servants of Christ Jesus. They belong to Him as Master. No one else.

Paul's incredibly grateful for this relationship that he has with the Philippians, who are partners in the gospel with him and share in his sufferings. And his prayer is that their _____ would abound? Their love. His greatest prayer is that their love would abound more and more.

He then encourages them to see how his situation—being housebound in Rome—has actually served to advance the gospel. And although he's restricted from doing the work of ministry and knows of others who are preaching from false motives, Christ is preached and Paul continues to _____. Rejoice. Why? Because “to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Regardless of what happens to him, Paul urges the Philippians to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel. They need to stand firm in _____ Spirit. One. One Spirit. One mind. Don't do anything out of selfish ambition.

Rather, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus. Who took on the nature of a _____ in order to then be exalted, and to be the King before whom every knee would bow.

Then last week, we read Paul's encouragement to the Philippians to work out this salvation that they have in Jesus. Because the one Spirit that they have is working *within* them to will and act according to God's good purpose.

With those key themes in mind, then, let's read our passage for this morning. **Philippians 2:19-30.**

A couple of weeks ago, now, Danny and I and the kids were driving down to Seattle with some family who had flown in and had—very generously—gotten us tickets to see a world cup game. So naturally we needed to drive to one of the three border crossings available and regretted the decision immediately upon arrival.

The line-up to cross the border ended up taking us an hour. And when you have two little kids in the car, there's a certain amount of improvisation and creativity needed to survive.

And, if you're anything like me, you additionally spend the entire time analyzing which line we *should* have picked, which line is going faster, why one lane is picking up speed, and of course complaining when a guard has clearly gone on break and closed a whole lane off.

Now, our passage this morning might feel kind of like sitting in a border line-up, waiting for the moment that we get to 'cross over.' But if we're paying attention, and open to the Spirit's activity, we might be surprised by what we encounter as a result of our waiting.

Because when we finally got the green light to pull into the booth where a US border guard was awaiting our arrival, a conversation ensued that I'd never had before experienced while crossing a border.

He was standing in his booth, draping a cold cloth around his neck and immediately started explaining how the AC wasn't working. In very cheerful fashion, he then took our passports, said, "Welcome home" to Daniel, and then asked him what he did for work. Danny shared, and then the guard looked at me and asked me what *I* did for work, so I told him that I was a pastor.

And he goes, "Reverend! Where at?" So I told him where I work. "When were you ordained?" he asked. "About eight years ago now," I said. And it's at this point in the conversation that I'm starting to worry that this guy is playing a border guard mind trick on us. But then all of a sudden, it got real. Like, really real.

"Eight years is a long time," he says reflectively. "I was saved when I was 13. Do you know the story of Job? That's my story. My wife left me, and I was angry, didn't want to pray for a long time. But then I started praying, because that's all you can do. But I didn't pray that she would come back, but that she would be happy. I just wanted God to allow her to be happy."

(Now, at this point I was starting to feel guilty that *we* were now the ones holding up the line.)

Because then he said to us, "You know when God promises that He'll bless you ten-fold, like how he did with Job? That's what happened to me. She came back. And everything was better. She was happy. We got a house. Everything was even better than it was. It's all grace."

"And this is my way of giving back to God," he said, "by telling the story. "It's how I give it all back to him." With big smiles on our faces, we said to him, "That's amazing. Thanks for sharing." And then he blessed our kids, we said our farewells, and went on our way.

Now, Danny and I have crossed a lot of borders in our lives, but we have never experienced something like that before. And it was as if the previous hour of frustration hadn't even happened. All my anger was gone. I felt like I'd been born again.

That is the power of a Spiritual connectedness—a Spirit like-mindedness—between Christian brothers and sisters, where you just get to delight in the Christ-like disposition of one another. It actually has the power to take our grumblings and transform them into joy.

And it's this kind of power that Paul is alluding to here in this passage. Paul's not explaining or teaching a lesson on it. There is no deep theological and inspiring quote that we can latch onto.

But it's a passage that is hugely inspirational if we take some time to see what Paul is doing here. V. 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."*

Remember, Timothy is with Paul in Rome, helping him to write this letter. And Timothy was with Paul when the church at Philippi was planted. So he's hoping to receive news of his release and then feel free to send Timothy to go and meet with them, to see how they've responded to the letter, address any misunderstandings, and then report back.

And we see Paul's love for Timothy here. These two are like an adopted father and son. There's no one else like him, says Paul. And the word that Paul uses there for 'like him' is a very similar word to the one he used earlier in verse 2 (see slide).

It means to be in a united spirit or soul. There is no one else who is more likeminded in Spirit.

What, specifically, is this like-spiritedness? It is that Timothy has *genuine* concern. They are like-Spirited and bound together because of a genuine concern for the wellbeing of the other believers. And it's a quality or characteristic that has always gone the distance with people, because so many have been so impacted by *disingenuous* relationships.

Think about it. When people are looking for relationship—whether it's romantic, friendship, or communal—the highest quality we look for, whether we realize it or not, is genuineness. Sincerity. Someone who is real, authentic, exactly what they appear to be. They're not fake. Their emotions and actions are sincere and free from pretense.

There is so much freedom when we are with someone who is genuine. Because you never have to guess what they're thinking. There's an honesty and transparency in the relationship.

And it's a quality that, frankly, is a prerequisite for doing life together as Christ would have us. Because a genuine love for Christ and for His people is what bonds Paul and Timothy together and enables them to be on mission for the gospel.

"Everyone looks out for their own interests," Paul says, *"not those of Jesus Christ."* In other words, everyone is inclined to be selfish, says Paul. But not Timothy. He's proved himself. I know that he *genuinely* cares about you, he says to the Philippians. And what a wonderful feeling that must be.

Remember, back in chapter 1, Paul's prayer was that the Philippians love would abound more and more. Why? Because this is what it looks like. Familial bonds are created when we serve Christ together, when we seek after the likeness and mindset of Christ, to live as one body in one Spirit. There's something *powerful* about the love available to us *in* Christ.

And it's not just with Timothy—as if Paul is playing favourites here. He speaks about someone named Epaphroditus as well, a brother in the Lord. A co-worker. A fellow soldier, Paul says, so perhaps someone who also had apostolic responsibilities.

He is someone who the Philippians send to help address some of Paul's needs, but he falls ill at some point—likely while travelling, but he 'risks his life' and continues on so that he can fulfill his mission.

Now remember, there were no cell phones at this time. From Philippi to Rome was almost 1200 miles, depending on the route (image). It was a long journey. So when you said farewell to a friend, you weren't likely to hear back from them for weeks.

It reminded of times here in our own community when we've had members travelling somewhere and we hear of an accident or illness, but don't yet know all the details. Email makes a huge difference, but what if we didn't have it? We'd be sick with anxiety.

Those who have family in Iran have been feeling this for months. I imagine hundreds of people in Venezuela are feeling it as a result of the earthquake that hit this week.

Epaphroditus had recovered, but he had no way of letting his friends in Philippi know. They had heard he was ill, but they didn't yet know the outcome; and Paul knows that the sooner Epaphroditus returns to Philippi, the happier everyone will be.

"God had mercy on him," Paul says, "but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. 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."

Now, this is a different kind of anxiety than what Paul speaks of in chapter 4 when he tells the church to 'not be anxious about anything.' This is an anxiety that Paul has *for* the Philippians. It's an anxiety or grief that is born out of concern, because the church doesn't yet know the good news of Epaphroditus' healing.

So basically he's saying to them, "I'm grieving because of your grief. And I can't stop grieving with you until you can rejoice with me. Even though I know that things have worked out, I can't fully embrace that until I know that you can join in it with me."

It's just an incredible demonstration of spiritual friendship and fellowship. Again, Paul's not giving them instructions here. He's not preaching a sermon. He's painting a picture of what genuine concern looks like when we are one in Christ. This is the *power* of sincerity in relationship that we should seek to embody. Because it changes everything.

Who's someone that you know who *genuinely* cares about your wellbeing? And what kind of difference has it made in your life? Just take a moment to thank God for them and rejoice that they're in your life.

And then ask yourself, who might need that kind of genuine concern from me?

Because is this not what Christ has done for us? Is this not why the symbol of the cross is still—and will forever be—the greatest symbol of genuine concern? Of authentic love? Of a God who will travel great lengths to put His own life down for us? Is this not why we can say that we are slaves to Christ Jesus who has actually called us friends? Family? Brothers and sisters under God's holy roof?

Is it not Christ who has demonstrated the purest form of 'genuine concern' that, even down to the most microscopic level, exhibits *zero* self-interest?

You know, I remember when I was first putting together this series, I wasn't sure if I would actually use this passage for a sermon text or just reference it.

But this is not a passage for us to skip over or treat like a border lineup that we just need to deal with and move on from. Paul is demonstrating in this part of his letter what it looks like, what it feels like, what naturally happens, when we take on the likeness of Christ Jesus and seek to live *as one* in Him.

We don't even realize how unique it is to have this kind of community with one another, to be a part of a network of believers who would bend over backwards to ensure our wellbeing. So many people in the world do not have this.

There's a beer commercial I saw the other day while watching a World Cup match, and it depicted various scenarios of someone sitting in front of a computer or TV watching a game by themselves, but then slowly, one-by-one, others come around to watch. And this individual—who was once by themselves—turns around to see this whole community of people around them.

The point of course was that the World Cup brings us together. And it does. It pulls vastly different people together through a common interest. The feeling that you get when you're watching a soccer game between two countries is surprisingly emotional. And when others are experiencing the same thing, you feel connected.

But even that is still a far cry from the depth of relationship that can be found in a Christian community. Why? Because the *Holy Spirit* is at work here. The power *of God* is at work here. Not in the building, but in *us*.

And the genuine concern that can be experienced in the Christian community—in our life together, and among people who *get it*, who understand how to suffer with those who suffer and grieve with those who grieve, and who seek the Spirit—is powerful. There's nothing else like it.

On a personal note, I know that there are many people here who have a genuine concern for my family's wellbeing, who would suffer with us if that was the path we needed to walk. And I can't even express how meaningful it is to say that.

That's what the Spirit of Jesus has provided for us here. It's what the Spirit of Jesus provided for Paul through the Philippians. It's what, I pray, the Spirit provides for each one of us.

Because it's a concern that is inspired by the Spirit of Jesus Christ Himself and comes from the very heartbeat of God.