

Philippians 5

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- [0 : 0 0] Now as we continue in this second chapter, we're about halfway through now, by the end of this evening, the letter to the Philippians. And if you remember that as we begin, verse 19, I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you.
- Remember that Paul has just been speaking about how potentially he is content to be offered upon the sacrifice and service of their, the Philippians' faith.
- And if that's the case, he joys and he rejoices with them all. We said how that at verse 17, the offer, it's the word for libation, for pouring out.
- And how that in the old pagan sacrifices, when people offered a meat or a beast on the altar, there would also be like a cup of wine or something poured out on top of it, as it were, to seal it in that sense.
- And it's the same term that is used in 2 Timothy chapter 4, verse 6. I am now ready to be offered. And the word again is for libation, the pouring out of a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.
- [1 : 0 5] So Paul is, on the one hand, quite sanguine about the possibility that he might be executed, that he might die. But we don't have the same sense in Philippians that he thinks it's imminent in the way that you do in 2 Timothy, for example.
- I mean, if you read 2 Timothy, you can see it is very much a farewell letter. It's almost, not quite a weariness, but there's certainly a sort of tie-off of a loose end.
- There's a sort of farewell element to it. He doesn't expect, really, to live much longer beyond it. But Philippians here, as he says, you know, he certainly hopes to, verse 24, I trust in the Lord, and I also myself shall come shortly.
- He expects to be either acquitted or released reasonably soon. But in the meantime, life goes on. Even in prison or even under guard, life goes on.
- He has already made reference to the fact that in chapter 1, how because of his confinement, and we saw there how throughout Caesar's household, the knowledge of the gospel is already being spread.
- [2 : 1 6] And this is because of the nature of how he is being guarded. We see there because of his bonds, because of the way that he's being guarded throughout all Caesar's household, it is becoming known throughout the capital about the reason that he is confined.
- And if he is being literally chained to a guard the whole time, and if the guard is being chained, if they have different shifts, they are going to overhear what he's doing, what he's saying, and so on.
- And the sort of gossip in the barrack room and so on is going to spread the knowledge of this new faith, this new religion throughout the Praetorian Guard in Rome.
- So he is able to use every circumstance. Our life goes on, even while he is confined. So in order to keep in touch with the Philippians, he is making use of two of those who are there with him.

He is saying that in due course, he expects to send Timothy shortly unto you, that I also need be of good comfort when I know your state. They have comforted him, yes, by sending the gift that Epaphroditus has brought.

[3 : 22] And we see that, for example, in chapter 4, we were to turn a page, verse 18, I have all and abound, I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God.

So he has received their good gifts, and Epaphroditus has brought it. He wants to send Timothy now back to them in due course to find out how they are doing, so that when Timothy brings word back again, he will rejoice and be strengthened.

Notice that there is the expectation that things will be improving. There is the expectation of growth, of blessing, of benefit to the Philippian church and to the church in general.

Although Paul is saying, you know, he will put comfort when he knows your state, he doesn't really expect to hear, oh, well, things are bad in Philippi, you know, the church has gone right down, and so many people have fallen away from their faith, and so many people now denying the Lord, and so he doesn't actually expect to hear that.

He expects to hear of good news. He expects to hear of strengthening. He expects to hear of growth. But until he gets confirmation of it, he's in anticipation. He wants to be of good comfort.

[4 : 41] Now, the word that we have translated as comfort literally means strength. He wants to be strengthened even more when he knows they are sick. To know how they are getting on is to know of their benefit, their blessing, their improvement.

That is his natural expectation. Now, this in the first instance is something perhaps we can learn from you, because there is a sense in which we, particularly in the West, have an expectation of decline.

We have an expectation of a kind of siege mentality, of having to sort of just do the best we can and grit our teeth and get on with it despite all the falling away and the desperate state of the world, and so on.

And there is a sense in which we no longer expect growth. We no longer expect blessing. And if we don't expect it and we don't ask for it, then we won't receive it.

If our expectation is of decline and we say, oh, well, if only the Lord would come back and that would sort it all out. Well, do we ask? Do we ask that if it's not time yet for the Lord to return in person, can he send an effusion of his spirit?

[5 : 49] Can he send an outpouring of his grace? Can he stir us up to witness, to gossip the gospel, as people say, a bit of a cliché now, I know, but to spread it by word of mouth, to live it out, to share with people what it is that drives us, what is or what should be the defining characteristic of our lives.

If we belong to Christ, that is the thing that defines us more than anything else. That is what unites us with brothers and sisters of all different skin colors and languages and nations and tribes across the world, as they are suffering their persecution in their countries.

We are far more one with them in blood and in unity and in the spirit than we are with our fellow Scots, who are the same skin color, speak the same languages as us, but are complete and total heathens.

Because we are one with our brothers and sisters in Christ across the world. That is our true family. And yes, we long to see our own nation redeemed.

We long to see our own nation saved in our own communities, regenerated. But if that is what we desire, then it behoves us to ask and to believe that the Lord will grant what we ask.

- [7 : 11] If we ask according to his will. We looked at some of that this morning in our Ezekiel passage. I will yet be inquired of by the house of Israel for this, says the Lord.
- When Paul says that he wants to send Timothy to them, it is in order that he may be of good comfort when he knows their state. Therefore, there is the expectation that that state, when he receives the news, will be better, will be improved, will always be.
- Good news of growth and strength and blessing. I will be sending Timothy because Timothy is the best man he has got.
- Timothy is as good as it gets. I have no man like mine who will naturally care for your state. Remember, this is the most important thing of all to Paul.
- This gospel that Timothy is the messenger of. He has been himself ready to be offered upon the sacrifice of their faith. Timothy is ready to expend his labor for that for which Paul is ready to give his life.
- [8 : 18] Timothy, no doubt, is ready to give his life too. It behoves us again to bear this in mind. We ought to be prepared to labor a little for that for which Paul is ready to give his life. I have no man like-minded.
- Now, the word that we have translated as like-minded is literally like-souled. We have a similar soul to him. There's nobody who almost shares my soul in the way that he does.
- We're almost like as such unity there. It's the nearest thing that most biblical commentators come up with in this is that if you were to turn back, don't turn up just now, you don't have to. But I mean, in Deuteronomy 13, there is a warning against being led away from the Lord, even by those who are your nearest and dearest.
- Verse 6 of Deuteronomy 13. If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or the son of thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, nor thy fathers.
- Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him. So there's these things. There's your wife, your mother, your brother, your son, your daughter, all the meanest and dearest you could possibly have, or thy friend, which is as thy own soul.
- [9 : 33] That's the sense here. Like-souled. Like-minded in this sense. That's the closeness of it. That's the bond that is here. Who will naturally care for your state.
- In other words, his love and care for you in Philippi is second nature to him. He doesn't have to be taught it. He doesn't have to have it explained to him. It's natural to him because he loves you guys so much, as Paul is saying to the Philippians.
- For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ. Now, this word all, is that really true? Is there nobody that Paul can rely?
- Everybody else going after the things which are Jesus, which are not Christ. They're all concerned with their own things. In the first instance, I think we have to take it with a pinch of salt.
- We have to recognize that there's a measure of hyperbole here, a measure of exaggeration for effect. Because even if we turn back to chapter 1, we see at verse 14, we read, Many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.
- [10 : 45] In verse 17, others preaching of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel. Are these guys all charlatans? Are they all just empty, seeking their own faith? Is Timothy really the only one that is faithful?
- Well, it's probably more like, you know, as we read in Psalm 116, where David says, you know, I said in my haste, all men are liars.

Now, clearly not all men are liars. There are some truthful ones. And clearly not all seek their own. But there's this sense of feeling that there's nobody else.

Feeling as though he's the only one that he can rely on. And part of what this tells us is that if we are to think in terms of rose-colored spectacles, we think, ah, the days of the apostles.

Ah, when the church was at its purest and at its best and so good. And they were so good at the doctrine. And they were so faithful to the Lord. And that was before all the rot set in.

[11 : 45] Well, clearly it wasn't before the rot set in. Rot sets in because we are human beings. Because we are fallen creatures. Sin is in us. And therefore, even the best that we do and the best that we can give is corrupted.

I say, you know, Paul himself writes about this in Romans 7. The good that I would, I do not. And the evil that I would not, that I do. And so he says, all seek their own. Not the things which are Jesus Christ.

It may be that around him there are those who he has been disappointed in time and time again. And Timothy has been a one consistent rot. But it's clearly not the case that absolutely everybody is not to be trusted.

But it is the case that everybody fails and is a sinner. It is the case that the early church had its share of people who were maybe half-hearted in their faith or fell back into the world or denied the Lord or, you know, wanted to worship other gods at the same time or were sexually immoral.

All these things. Because the church in every age has been made up of fallen human beings. Sinners. That's why Christ came to save them. And that Paul needs people he can rely on.

[12 : 59] And all seek their own. Not absolutely all. But Timothy clearly is exceptional. You know the proof of him that as a son with the Father he hath served with me in the gospel.

Notice he has served me. But he has served with me alongside. And we need to remind ourselves. You know, just as he writes again to Timothy, you know, he says, Give full proof of thy ministry to 2 Timothy chapter 4 verse 5.

He says, You know the proof of it. You know what he's done. Let's just bear in mind how, you know, vital Timothy has been to Paul's ministry. Then, as now, you cannot have a complete total one man band.

There has to be help. There has to be people who will share a workload, who will do some of the work. Even if it's being, as Timothy and Epaphrodite say, messengers. They're taking the messengers back.

You can't hire somebody you don't know who's going to take your money and throw your letter in the river two minutes later. You've got to give it to trusted companions who will hazard their lives, yes, in order to keep the channels of communication and all the different networks going.

[14 : 08] Timothy is his utterly trustworthy lieutenant. He's been with him in Philippi when he first came in in Acts 16. He's with him in Thessalonica and Berea as we see in Acts 17.

He's there with him in Corinth as we see in Acts 18. He's there with him in Ephesus in Acts 19. We see that he is with him in prison in Rome. How do we know this?

Because Paul is writing to the Philippians from Rome where he is incarcerated. Now, Timothy is not under the same sentence. He's able to come and go. But he is there with Paul in the same situation.

He is sharing his confinement, as it were. Now, I've never actually visited anyone in prison. Some people will have done perhaps, but I've never actually had the experience.

But I imagine that even for visitors, it will be a hugely intimidating experience. You come to the prison and then the guards will check through who you are, your dates, and they'll yell at you through one gate and then shut that and then another door and then grills and bars and bolts and keys and everything before you finally get in to see the person you're trying to see.

[15 : 19] I would imagine it's a hugely intimidating blitz. Now, for the person who actually is incarcerated, you must seem like the lucky one or the blessed one because you sit there opposite them and then you can walk out at the end of the day.

But still, you must feel like everything's really closed in round you. Now, in order to be sharing voluntarily in the confinement and incarceration of somebody who is there for the gospel's sake, you've got to be committed.

You've got to be faithful because it takes a certain kind of courage to live day by day as though you were a prisoner when in fact you are not necessarily so.

And this is what Timothy is taking on. So he is with Paul in Rome during his confinement. That's why Paul begins this letter, Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi.

Likewise, he begins the letter to the Colossians in the same way. Likewise, he begins that, the second letter to the Corinthians and the first and second letters to the Thessalonians. Five letters of Paul are, we might say, co-authored with Timothy.

[16 : 33] He is right up there with Paul as the sort of joint sender of the letter. He is also one sending his greetings to the church in Rome in Romans 16, 21.

He is there with Paul again. You can't underestimate the importance of Timothy to Paul's ministry. So when he says, I'm going to send you Timothy, it's like saying I'm going to send you my right arm.

I'm going to send you one who is so close to me, my total trusted lieutenant, that other than me physically in person, you couldn't get anyone more closely who would represent me as he does.

Now in doing this, of course, he is following the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom, of course, we read in Luke's account, for example, chapter 10, verse 1, after these things, the Lord appointed other 70 also and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place where he himself would come.

You might think, okay, well, what's the big deal? He's sending them out, making the way ready, preparing the way. And Paul himself says, verse 24, So Timothy will be coming soon, and I would hope to follow him.

[17 : 56] What does that tell us? Well, like with the example of Jesus, it tells us that such is my trust of Timothy that I'm going to follow after him. And so if he were to say or do or teach anything that would be at odds with what I would teach, it would very, very quickly be exposed.

If he were to go there and say, well, you know, Paul says this, but listen, guys, I'm here now. I'm Timothy. I'm his lieutenant. I'm telling you to do this, this, and this. Never mind what Paul says. So that when he turns up there doing something completely different, then he'll soon know, and a clash will soon be apparent, and it will soon be clear that there is a division between them, and all that dissension will come into the church.

Likewise, when Jesus sends the 70 out, it's to the places where he himself would come. They are to go teaching and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and it is inconceivable that they will be teaching a different message from that which he himself will bring when he comes shortly afterwards.

Otherwise, you know, who are you going to believe? Jesus or the messengers? Who got it wrong? The master or the servant? A servant who is going ahead of his master has no interest in the sense, no benefit if he decides to go off the rails and do something completely different.

Because if he does, his misdemeanors will soon be exposed. The master is coming quite soon afterwards, and he's going to want that to render an account.

[19 : 30] He's going to want to see, well, what have you been telling him? What have you been teaching him? Have you done the things that I said? Have you prepared the way like I said? Have you told him the things I told you I needed you to tell him? Have you acted as I would have acted?

Have you been like my deputy? And if not, it will soon be very, very clear, because the master is coming behind him sooner or later, but he is coming behind him.

Him, therefore, I hope to send presently, as soon as I shall see how it will go with me, but I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly.

Just as in Luke chapter 10, the Lord appointed 70 of it also, and sent them two and two before his face, into every city and place, whether he himself would come.

Now, of course, eventually, the Lord is going to come back anyway. And when he does, he will appear in such a way as it is, you know, he says, like lightning shining from one side of the heavens to the other.

[20 : 29] Not only does it do it in an instant, but if, say, lightning were to flash out over the bay, just standing, could we say, ah, yes, it's in Drenishar there, but it's not up in Mervic.

It's over there in Scannabay, but it's not in Targut. You can't pinpoint exactly where a lightning flash is, because it fills the whole sky. And we can't say, oh, yes, the Lord is going to come back on that spot, but not on that one.

When he comes, he will fill the heavens and the earth in such a way as he will be in every place where his servants have been before him.

And that is effectively the whole world. He will fill it in such a way as a flash of lightning that when he comes, he will know whether or not the people who went before him and the people who brought this message have been faithful to his word or not.

Now, that is a huge responsibility for every one of us as a Christian. We seek to be a Christian, but also especially on those charged with the proclamation of his word, because it will be very easily tested whether or not what is proclaimed from any pulpit anywhere is in line with the word of God or whether it is at odds with it.

[21 : 43] Now, as you can imagine, that's quite a scary prospect for those of us who are preachers of the gospel, but it shouldn't be unduly scary if we know, no, we've stuck to what the word of God says.

This is what he said. This is what the world wanted to do, but we stuck with what the word of God said. Then we can render up the account and say, Lord, this is your word. This is what you gave us.

This is what we preached. He sent them to every place that he himself would come. And Paul sends Timothy ahead to Philippi because he himself expects to come shortly.

That is why he sends his most trusted lieutenant. The Lord has told us that he will come back again, whether it will be soon or late in terms of our timescale.

It doesn't really matter. If I were to ask each one of us to think into your own heads and your own minds, a brutal question. Firstly, what is your age now? Secondly, how many years would you realistically expect to continue on this earth?

[22 : 48] Now, none of us, of course, knows what tomorrow brings, but let's assume that you had as full a life and as active a life as you could wish for. How many years, realistically, would you expect to have?

Now, if the Lord comes back within that time, then you'll meet him and see him as he is. If he doesn't, then in pretty much the timescale you've mentally got sooner or later, within that timescale, you'll be brought face to face with him at his seat of judgment anyway.

So one way or another, we will be brought face to face with the Lord, either here on earth or in glory. When I say in glory, I mean, you know, whether that's our ultimate destination or whether we are for an eternity without him.

We will see him as he is, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. So he has sent his message, his word, into all places where he himself will come.

That is what Paul does. That is what Jesus does. Yet I supposed it necessary to send you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labor, a fell soldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants.

[24 : 00] Now, Epaphroditus, as we know, chapter 4, verse 18, is the one who brought the gift, the support, the money that the Philippians have sent to help sustain and support Paul during his time of confinement.

And as he's already mentioned in his earlier chapters there, it's not just the fact that, ooh, look how much money he's sent off, ooh, what a wonderful gift. It's the fact that they have remembered him.

It is the fact that when he is confined, he's not out of sight, out of mind. They are remembering him. They're praying for him. They're giving to him. And here's Epaphroditus with their blessing, their benefit, and their gift to him, and so on.

And here he has been ministering to Paul and helping him and so on, but he has in the process fallen sick. And there is a sense, if you sort of read this latter part of the chapter, and read slightly between the lines, Timothy's accolade is comparatively brief.

Almost as though, you know that acne phrase, needs no introduction. It says, you know, you know the proof of it. I don't have to talk about Timothy at great length. But in the meantime, I'm sending to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labor, and fellow soldier.

[25 : 16] These are all pretty, you know, high praise terms. But your messenger and he that ministered to my wants. Now, the word that we have translated for ministered to my wants to serve here.

It's a particular Greek word which translates roughly as, in the old days, when some Greek citizens would be, or Roman citizens would be, extremely wealthy, and others just sort of muddling along, like the rest of us, if there was some particular civic or public work that needed done, say, an aqueduct to be built for water, or new engineering works to be dug, or a theatre to be prepared, or a ship to be kitted out, or service in the Navy, or a merchant fleet, or raising a regiment of troops, or whatever.

You know, the public purse would have to be expended on these things. And that's always expensive. If you had some rich benefactor who says, well, listen, I know that the town needs water, so I will finance, out of my own pocket, the construction of this well, this aqueduct, bringing all the water, and the engineering works that's needed for it, I'll bear the whole cost, and I'll gift it to the town.

And they thought, wow, that would be fantastic, that would be great, and we'd have all this benefit, and the public purse wouldn't suffer any, any diminution at all. We'd be able to use the money for other projects that we need as well.

Great. Who doesn't rejoice in such a gift as that? Or, we need to raise a regiment for the Imperial Service. I'll do that. I'll pay for that. I'll raise a regiment of troops, I'll equip them, and feed them, I'll get their uniforms, and their arms, and their equipment, and everything they need, and I'll pay for all that, and pay their wages, and send them off to war.

[26 : 57] Brilliant. Saves the public purse being expended. Now, in order to do such, you know, civic charity, in order to do such works, one has to have a certain amount to give in the first place, business.

You also have to be willing to become impoverished, or at least to be considerably poorer yourself, for the benefit of others. Building aqueducts, kicking out ships, raising regiments, all that sort of thing, these don't come cheap.

No matter how rich you are, by the time you've done that, you're going to be considerably poorer. So, whatever you had to start with, you have given a huge amount of it for the benefit of others.

Now, the Greek word for that was a certain word, *liturgoi*, which meant these kind of benefactors, these self-emptying benefactors who gave of their own means for the good of others, for the public good.

Now, this is the word that Paul uses here as that sense of ministered to my wants, this *liturgoi* that he uses for Epaphroditus here.

[28 : 04] He emptied himself. Whatever he had, he gave it all in order to benefit me, ministered to my wants, I am the better off because of all that he has done for me at huge cost to himself.

Now, he may not have been hugely rich to start with, but he has emptied himself out to benefit me, such is the level of service that he has given. He longed after you all.

Now, we don't know whether that just meant he was homesick or he missed Philippi or he had a burden for them in his heart. He was full of heaviness because that he had heard that he had been sick.

Now, you think, now, this is not just sort of a phone call time scale, remember. This is not just sending a text. Remember, Epaphroditus has come with this benefit to Paul, this gift, whatever it is.

He has stayed with him, he has served with him. In the doing of it, he has fallen sick. The word, or the news of his sickness and its seriousness, has got back to Philippi, which, remember, is in northern Greece, quite a long way from Rome.

[29 : 12] And then, the knowledge that they have received that word has itself come back again to Rome. So, however long it takes for somebody to journey from Rome to Philippi and back again, which will be a considerable amount of time, that's how long Epaphroditus has been there with Paul, longer than that because he's served him, he's worked with him and he's fallen sick and now he has heard that they have heard that he's fallen sick.

So, if you think about it, you need to get our heads into this that this is how much time has elapsed. This thank you letter that Paul is writing, it's after a considerable amount of time has elapsed.

He has emptied himself to serve Paul in this way. For indeed, he was sick nigh unto death, but God had mercy on him and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

I said to him, therefore, the more carefully and more diligently that when you see him again you may rejoice that I may be the less sorrowful. Now, why Paul would have sorrows may be others that those who were working with him or serving him had died.

Perhaps the confinement was getting to him, whatever. He doesn't want to lose faithful friends and helpers, but remember, if he's sick nigh unto death, it's not just, ah, no, he's okay, he's better.

[30 : 34] It's like when somebody says, oh, how did you help me? Well, ah, it was nothing, it was okay. He's not saying it's nothing. He was at death's door, literally, and whatever it was, some people have said, oh, maybe he just wore himself out in the service of the gospel, maybe he was just absolutely exhausted, his long journey, and then serving and preaching and teaching with Paul and carrying letters and doing all these things, he just wore himself out.

Exhaustion and fatigue and so on, yes, that can lay you low for a while, but it isn't usually life-threatening. It's been suggested by some, it may have been some of the Roman fever or Blackwater fever or whatever it might be that they had, they would fall sick with.

You know, an awful lot of illnesses were waterborne in those days because water was suspect. It was of poor quality and it carried all the bacteria and everything that people didn't know about and people didn't boil or drink in water.

So, a lot of people fell sick with waterborne diseases and diaries and cholera and all these things. And whatever he had, it clearly almost killed him.

That's the fact, that's what Paul says. He was sick nigh to death. But God had mercy on him and not in him only but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

[31 : 55] Now, this may raise a little question which is, you know, okay, he was sick, he was nearly dead, but, you know, in Acts 19, we read verses 11 and 12, God brought special miracles by the hands of Paul so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons and the diseases departed from them and the evil spirits went from them.

And also, you know, we read when they're washed up on Malta and so on, when they're shipwrecked there and they learn that the chief man of the island, whose name was Puglius, received us and lodged us three days courteously, came to pass the father of Puglius who was sick of a fever and of a bloody flux, to whom Paul entered in and prayed and laid his hands on him and healed him.

So when this was done, others also which had diseases in the island came and were healed, who also honoured us with many honours and when we departed, they elated us with such things as were necessary.

Brilliant, great. So it does beg the question, so why didn't Paul just lay his hands on Epaphroditus? Why didn't he just pray over him and heal him?

Well, I think, you know, if we go back again to Acts 19, we've got a wee clue there of what we are told. Acts 19, verse 11, God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul.

[33 : 20] It's not at Paul's disposal this gift of the Spirit. It's not waving a magic wand or pushing a button and saying, I'm Paul. I command you to be healed.

No, Paul is just the instrument, the tool in the hands of God. And sometimes the Lord gives to his apostles this power to heal and to cleanse and to cast out demons and other times they do not have it.

You know, this is one thing that should be hugely instructive for us as we hear about those who say, oh yeah, I'm casting out demons and exercising things and I'm laying my hands on people and healing them.

Yes, God may choose to do that through certain people but it will be limited. It will be limited now just as it was limited then. At certain stages in the church's history, including in the apostolic church, the apostles were given the power to huge amounts of signs and wonders.

But here's Paul, an apostle who has been used of God in the past to heal and to cleanse people from their sins and their diseases and their illnesses and it's caused people to trust in the Lord, to believe and to be changed in their hearts because of what the Lord does to him.

[34 : 35] But here now, he appears not able to do it. Either that or he's not willing to do it, which is less likely if he had the power to do it, it is not at his disposal.

This is what we learn from this. It is not at his disposal. God may choose to work sounds and wonders through his apostles or he may not.

It is God who is in charge, not the apostles themselves. It is the artist who wields the paintbrush, not the paintbrush that actually does the work.

So likewise, it is the apostle used of God or not, as the case may be. But clearly, they must have prayed and they must have prayed like mad that he would be healed because in the fullness of time, God had mercy on him and not on him only but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

And if we were to go back to Psalm 116, we would see that Paul, like Epaphroditus, particularly himself, might have cause to pray. As we read the verse, the sorrows of death come past me.

[35 : 46] The pains of hell got hold upon me. I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord. O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul. Gracious is the Lord and righteous.

Yea, our God is merciful. The Lord preserved the simple. I was brought low and he helped me. Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.

For thou hast delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living and so on.

The prayers of faithful saints of the Lord are frequently answered as they pray and believe and trust that the Lord will answer them.

If there are occasions when God says no, it is because his timing and his purpose is other than ours.

[36 : 43] And we have to allow for that. Sometimes God says no. Why is Epaphroditus spared here? He is spared so that Paul won't have sorrow upon sorrow and so he can get up off his sick bed, he can be strengthened and he can carry on working for the Lord.

Now we might think, oh, wouldn't it be great if all those who are sick and all those who are in prison could be free and set off again to serve the Lord? Sometimes God requires that we serve him with our illness, with our confinement, with our imprisonment, with our suffering rather than in spite of it.

I may have used the illustration before, but there was a minister in Aberdeen of whom I knew who had been terribly active in the days of his youth and he had been represented in his university at sports and rugby and all these things, a tall, athletic man.

And then he developed polio. And with his polio, he became severely disabled, such that he needed crutches, such that he was unable to walk without them.

And at one stage in Glasgow, he was a chaplain to overseas students. and he was given this man to go and visit who had come from a foreign country and he was very homesick and he was down and he'd stopped going to lectures and he was just, you know, encasing himself in his own misery and not going out at all.

[38 : 08] And he found the address and, you know, as you know, many of the houses in Glasgow were tenements with, you know, three or four stories high and he was, of course, right at the top floor and so there was nothing for it.

He opened the door and started with the crutches up the steps, no lifts to press, no nothing and just all the way up, floor after floor after floor and finally, he got to the top and he knocked on the door and the guy didn't answer.

So he opened the door and he came in and sort of hobbled in and eased himself down in the chair and there's the guy still looking at his feet and not looking up at all. And he started talking to him and he started to try and sort of engage with him a bit and he wasn't taking him on and he wasn't taking him on.

And then out of the corner of his eye he saw the crutches, the edge of him and his eye travelled up to see the guy's useless legs and him sitting there sweating in the chair and he looked at the door and you could see the light beginning to dawn how that he must have dragged himself on his crutches up all these flights of stairs just to get there to speak to him that he had spent that much time that much effort that much love you might say on this lost soul and he began to turn a corner after that.

And the minister said that that was the first time he realised that he would be able to serve the Lord with his disability rather than just in spite of it.

[39 : 44] Sometimes the Lord requires us to serve him with our illness, with our disability, with our suffering, with our confinement.

Sometimes our desperate prayer is that we be healed and set free. God says no. Now most of you will have heard and known no doubt about the singer or the Christian presenter Johnny Erickson.

And you might know that she was injured in a diving accident in her teens and how she was effectively paralysed from the neck down. And she couldn't do anything and she couldn't, you know, move any part of her body and she had prayed and prayed and prayed that the Lord would heal her of her disability.

And all this time he hasn't. And yet, the way that he has used her and the way that he has spread his message through her witness and testimony is such that nobody would have heard of her outside of her own family, outside of her own immediate acquaintance had she not continued in that disability.

But because she did, the message that she is able to give, the message of hope in the midst of hopelessness is one that has spread around much of the world.

[41 : 04] It's pretty rough on the individual but God is no man's debtor and God enables us to serve him with our limitations and weaknesses and disabilities, not just in spite of them.

Sometimes God says no to our prayers but he does so for his right and good and holy reasons. In this instance, God said yes to the prayers of Epaphroditus and of Paul and of all the others.

I sent him therefore the more carefully that when ye see him again ye may rejoice that I may be the less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness and hold such in reputation because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death not regarding his life to supply your lack of service toward me.

Now some have suggested that perhaps there was a wee bit lacking in Epaphroditus here. Why is it the fact that he had fallen sick? Why is that such a fearful thing to him that they should hear?

Perhaps he had been told no don't go don't make that journey that is beyond you you know you've got fragile health you fall sick you'll die and then he did fall sick and then my thought of going back and saying we told you you shouldn't have done it.

[42 : 18] There's almost the sense of he's heading for a row when he gets home because Paul is building him up my brother and companion in labor and fellow soldier your messenger he that emptied himself ministered to my wants I sent him more carefully receive him in the Lord with all gladness hold such in reputation he is effectively telling him you make sure you give this guy a good welcome you make sure you build him up and you affirm him don't make him feel insignificant don't make him feel like he's failed and anyway I'm sending him back to you and you better welcome him you better give him the honor that is his due you know you can sense that here if you read between the lines here why does he need to label a point because there is this sense that Epaphroditus somehow might have let the side down has he failed in some way is this his final chance for serving anyway Paul sends him back with this huge accolade of how he has served and risked his life not regarding his life verse 30 there just apply your lack of service toward me now the word not regarding his life this translates as effectively the word for gambling it is a Greek word that means one who plays the dice and it is effectively gambling with his life and this kind of service service this kind of almost reckless service of the Lord gave rise to a group of people in the church who were described as the Greek word as the parabolina or the parabolina and they were effectively the gamblers the risk takers is how it translates and it means that they risked their lives when there was plague they went in and they buried the dead and they ministered to the plague victims and they looked after them and they gave them dignity save when everybody else was just clearing off it meant that they would feed the hungry and the lepers and those who were diseased and life threatening they would gamble with their own lives in a way that the rest of pagan society just wasn't going to do and this was part of the witness this was part of the self-emptying service that they risked and gambled with their own lives so that others would benefit from it this is what

Epaphroditus is and because he has come near the death and because he has gambled with his own life and because he took such risks we have heard of him Epaphroditus is not mentioned outwith the letter to the Philippians this is the only place where he is mentioned he's not the same as Epaphroditus who's a Colossian which is 400 miles away on a different continent who's mentioned in Colossians and in Phileans not the same individual Epaphroditus but Epaphroditus are different people Epaphroditus is only mentioned in Philippians this is all that we know about him because he risked his life and his health and was near to death for the service of the gospel and you would think oh great weakness great hopelessness great emptiness but this is what he did and so it's not just Paul who knows about him it's not just Philippi like Johnny Enixen everybody knows about around the world everybody knows Epaphroditus because he emptied himself and now his name is still known 2000 years later

God is no man's debtor whatever we take of ourselves to give to him he repays a thousand fold and more whatever is causing you to hold back from commitment to the Lord whatever you enable yourself to keep it won't be worth it give it to the Lord and he will make of it something that will last something which will be a treasure not only in Philippi not only in Scalpi not only in Scotland but throughout the realms of heaven and throughout all eternity let's pray