

Title: What's the Best Thing You Can Do For Your Church?

Text: Philippians 2:19-30

Date: April 28, 2019 sermon notes

INTRO.

Background. How did we get to where we presently are in the Philippian letter?

Acts 16:10 → Paul was supernaturally led to visit Philippi through a “Macedonian Vision”

- Remember the old song:
“We have heard the Macedonian call today...send the light, send the light...and a golden offering at the cross we lay...send the light, send the light...send the light, the blessed Gospel light...let it shine, from shore to shore...send the light, the blessed gospel light...let it shine, forevermore.”

While Paul was there in Philippi – God did many signs and wonders.

- The city went from having no Christian presence, to having a very significant Christian presence, rather quickly.

Acts 16:20 reports, “*The whole city was turned upside down*” as the Gospel witness of Paul and the new Christians spread like wildfire.

The political leaders saw the growing crowds, and they immediately had Paul and Silas incarcerated.

- Paul was charged with disturbing the city.
- Paul was maligned for promoting a religion that was not commonly accepted throughout Rome.

Acts 16:22-23 → Paul and Silas were beaten with rods, severely flogged, and thrown into jail.

Acts 16:25 → At Midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns (worship) when the Lord allowed a violent earthquake to create the opportunity for jailbreak.

- The guard almost committed suicide, for he assumed all the prisoners ran away!
- But none of the prisoners ran away!
- They chose to remain with Paul in jail, and to hear more of Christ.

Revival and spiritual awakening begin to rise throughout all of Philippi.

However, Paul was an unusual man. There will never be another quite like him. Filled with apostolic power – *Paul actually had the heart of a pastor AND the heart of a missionary at the exact same time.*

- On the one hand, Paul was a true evangelist; a true missionary – he felt called to continue his missionary travels of planting churches all around the Roman Empire.
- But on the other hand, Paul never lost his pastoral, shepherding heart.

Even as Paul goes into new cities and sees new converts, he cares deeply about the maturity and discipleship of those who have already been converted.

- For Paul, Christianity isn't just about new fruit...it's also about healthy fruit.

The point is: we see a pattern developing throughout the New Testament →

Paul goes to a city...shares Christ in the city...organizes a church (infrastructure in the city)...moves on to do it all over again in a new city...while constantly circling back to check on the health of the churches in the previous cities.

This is Paul's heart: visit a city...make connections...raise up leaders...write letters...circle back...stay in touch...keep developing the leaders, and so on.

And Paul basically proposes this is the model of "church" in the New Testament until Christ turns. We seek to continue the unfinished task of taking the gospel to the world.

- Is it about new converts? YES.
- Is it about planting new churches? YES.
- Is it about maturing the old converts? YES
- Is it about going deeper in the older, existing churches? YES.

In other words, this is church:

We want lost people to get saved – it's called evangelism.

We want saved people to grow in godliness – it's called discipleship.

If you care only about discipleship – you aren't a good disciple – because God's heart is for reaching the lost.

If you think solely focusing on the lost – will deepen the quality of the work – you have missed God's heart because God cares about quality as much as he does about quantity.

Evangelism (reaching people) and discipleship (growing people) are the heart and soul of a true New Testament church.

Two questions that will never go away: 1) What are we teaching? 2) Who are we reaching?

(ILLUS: They are the two wings of an airplane. One wing only and it never takes flight!)

Paul's passion for a truly healthy, godly, holy church is seem demonstrated here in Philippians.

A great work begins in Philippi (Acts 16).

- They eagerly receive the word.
- Many converted to faith in Christ.
- They joyfully participate in God's work.
 - Raising funds to support Paul for the next leg of his travels.

- Send the financial gift by way of Epaphroditus, their trusted leader/messenger.

Paul must move on – he goes from Philippi to Thessalonica.

As Paul moves on, he hits trouble – and finds himself in jail now (likely in Rome).

- Paul desperately desires and prays to return to Philippi to check on them.
- But thus far he's been unable.

So Paul seeks in Phil 2:19-30 to raise up Timothy and Epaphroditus to visit Philippi on his behalf until he is able to personally lay eyes on the church there.

Several immediate lessons that just jump off the page at us:

- A. The church's responsibility: make disciples of all people/nations...it's what we're called to do. There is no plan B. (Disciples from Woodstock to the World)
- B. God is indeed working in hearts all around the world – God is constantly drawing people to himself.
- C. The sign of a true believer: he's willing to go anywhere, anytime, at any price. (Nothing we are “unwilling” to do for our Lord, except violate His word)
- D. No one person can do it all – indeed we need one another, and we combine our gifts and efforts for maximum impact.
- E. The church must raise up disciples (key leaders) → who do what? → They themselves go and raise up disciples (and key leaders).

This is exactly what Paul is doing in Philippians 2!

First, Paul hopes to send Timothy to the Philippians, and he hopes to hear good news about their spiritual progress (2:19-24). This is a beautiful portrait of a *real* pastor. Paul couldn't be there to check on them himself (in person).

Paul is literally telling them: *I can't be there to shepherd you, but I aim to send the very best I can...to be available to you.*

2:19, notice Paul:

- Hopes in the Lord Jesus...
- Wants to send Timothy (word means mission, task, ambassador).
- Wants to be encouraged by a good report from Philippi.

LESSON: only God knows if Timothy can get through to Philippi (lots of persecution going on).

LESSON: only God knows if Timothy will find spiritual fruit when he arrives (lots of adversity).

But Paul refused to let the barriers prevent him from being “all in” for Christ, missions, and discipleship.

- Yes, there are many barriers and obstacles to discipleship.
(Hardship...busyness...ignorance...spiritual warfare)
- For Paul, even though it's hard → it's worth it!

Q: why would Paul specifically want to send Timothy?

A: because Timothy's compassion and character had already been proven to Paul amidst their personal hardship.

Listen to 2:20 → Paul on Timothy, *“I have no one else like him...genuinely cares about your interests...not interested in himself, but in Christ and others.”*

- Timothy stands out from among the pack (v 20).
- He stands out from the pack because he wants to serve the pack (v 20).
- Everyone else is about their own interests.
- But Timothy's character has been proven!
- He served with him in the gospel ministry like a son with his father!
 - Like a family business!

In other words – Paul is saying to the Philippians, “I know Timothy will serve you well collectively, because in deep personal distress, he has served me well, personally.”

Notice this – what made Timothy special was his humility, faithfulness, willingness, and versatility.

- 1) Timothy assisted Paul in Paul's personal hardship.
- 2) Timothy is willing to accept the responsibility of going to Philippi and organizing the churchwide discipleship efforts at this time.

LESSON: before he serves many (Philippi)...he has already served one (Paul).

Paul asks Jesus in prayer, *“Please let's SEND (2:19) Timothy...”*

Send = reputation of cleanness, selflessness, and ready availability now (in the present).

LESSON: the best Christians I know...they “stay ready” (always preparing, always on standby).

ILLUS: can you imagine calling 911, and the ambulance driver says, “Well we need to load the ambulance...get some fuel...get dressed...check our training certificates to get current...”

- No! First responders' job is to stay ready!

Paul is saying: Timothy is ready now...because Timothy has been preparing!
 "Stay ready!" Timothy!

- 1) You might have an older, needy, lonely, limited-mobility person (like Paul) that needs your encouragement. Stay ready, Timothy!
- 2) Or you might have some young, green, growing group of new believers that need your leadership! Stay ready, Timothy!

Are you willing to help someone, one-on-one? YES
 Are you willing to serve a group? YES

FACT: if you won't help one...you'll never help many! (ILLUS: "Who's Your One?")

FACT: Timothy was useful to Paul, then entrusted with a larger task of helping at Philippi.

Second, Paul was compelled to send Epaphroditus to Philippi immediately, because it gave them both mutual strength to carry on the work of Christ (2:25-30). Epaphroditus was the trustworthy messenger that left Philippi...traveled to locate Paul in Rome...and deliver to him the care package and financial gift the Philippians had prepared to give.

This was a risky endeavor...but Epaphroditus was willing to do it.

Here's what we know about Epaphroditus:

- He was trustworthy.
- He was courageous.
- He was helpful to Paul.
- He was selfless (didn't care about his health/safety...only focus was on others).

Notice how Paul refers to Epaphroditus (2:25).

- Brother – you are like my family.
- Coworker – you are my teammate.
- Fellow soldier – we have each other's backs in a foxhole.

2:26-27. Sometime in the process of this ministry...Epaphroditus gets very, very sick – sick to the point it could be fatal.

Epaphroditus's only worry? That the Philippians would find out he was sick and be worried about him.

- He was worried...that they would be worried.

This is noteworthy: God had mercy on Epaphroditus (2:27).

- God healed him of the sickness.
- Paul said, “*so I wouldn’t have sorrow upon sorrow.*” (Paul – to be in jail, and risk losing one of his only friends would be unbearable).

2:28-30. But Paul knows God’s hand is on Epaphroditus!

- Paul is eager to send him to check on the Philippians (v 28).
- The Philippians are told to welcome Epaphroditus with:
 - Great joy.
 - Great honor.

Why? Because he was willing to risk his life for the cause of Christ!

This is so good about Epaphroditus!

- He was sent on a mission.
- He was chosen for the mission because he had special character.
- On the mission...he got sick, nearly died.
- But God in mercy healed him and raised him up.
- Welcome him back with joy and honor at what he was willing to do!

What a beautiful, foreshadowing picture of Christ! Christ is the great messenger from God!

- Christ was sent on a mission!
- Christ was chosen for this mission because he had perfect character.
- While on this mission he died...because he willingly laid down his life.
- But God in mercy raised him...Christ was dead but made alive!
- Welcome him back with joy and honor!

Summary of the passage → Paul desired to continue serving the Philippians, but he needed to send Timothy and Epaphroditus to serve them until Paul regained his freedom.

- Thank God Timothy and Epaphroditus were willing to go!

FACT. It is the Christian’s sacred duty – to faithfully serve where God leads, regardless of the circumstances, and make as many disciples as possible, until God calls us home.

FACT: Christians must serve where God leads, regardless of the challenges, putting Christ and others before self, for as long as it takes!

Q: What’s the best thing you can do for your church?

BIG IDEA. The best thing you can do for your church is selflessly put the mission of Christ, and the needs of others, before yourself.

Notice God's word to Paul – I want you to serve here in jail...even if it hurts...until I open another door for you.

- “*Serve while you wait...*” (that's what Paul did in jail, see [Phil 1-2](#).)
- Q: Will I stay faithful here...even if I'd rather go there?

Notice God's word for Timothy and Epaphroditus – I want you to be willing to go where I send you, even at a moment's notice, even at great personal cost.

- Q: Will I go there...even I'd rather stay here?

LESSON: God wants me to be obedient/faithful to his calling...not obedient to my preferences.

- Preferences matter less.
- Calling/Needs matter more.

Application 1 – like Paul, are you in a difficult place right now. Here's four questions to consider:

- What are you going through right now?
- How might God want to use it?
- Who can you encourage while you go through it?
- To whom might you witness to for Christ as you go through it?

Note, even though Paul was in jail...ironically...we see Christ in it!

We see you in your trial...but through your attitude...can we see Christ in it?

Application 2 – like Timothy and Epaphroditus, am I willing to be faithful in the small things?

- *Zech 4:10, Do not despise the day of small beginnings...*
- *Matt 25:23, Well done good servant, you have been faithful in a little, I'll make you ruler over much...*

Application 3 – here's what I love about Paul's example: the best leaders I know, are the leaders that fight the same fight as the people. Paul was wrestling with God's will in his own life...this is what helped him speak with authority into the Philippian church, Timothy, and Epaphroditus!

- God knows, I want God's will for the USA, for FBCW, etc.
 - But what is God's will for Jeremy?

Application 4 – here's a question for FBCW, like the Philippian church, if someone was going to do a spiritual checkup on us, what would they find?

- Oh yes, still faithful, persevering, believing?
- Or caving to the economic/social fabric of Rome? It's just easier to be all-in on Roman culture!

CONCL. In closing, today's text is about Paul seeking to send Timothy/Epaphroditus to help the Philippian church!

- I love that Paul points out Epaphroditus was willing to sacrifice his life for the church.

FACT: God sent Jesus to us! We were lost...undone...without direction...we needed hope/help!

- Jesus DID sacrifice his life for the church! (John 15:13).

- 1) God sent Jesus to us!
- 2) Jesus has sent us into the world! (John 20:21)

The best thing you can do for your church is selflessly put the mission of Christ and the needs of others before yourself!