

Text: Philippians 2:19-30 (Pew Bible pg.1162)

Title: “Christ’s Servants”

INTRODUCTION

Before I get to my text this morning I want to just report to you that my trip to India was a tremendous experience. Don Spitzer, Terry Coy and I represented our church in various training events in Karnataka. But we also were able to take along members from four other churches with the hope that they will take on a role in reaching South India for Christ. I saw firsthand the impact our church is making in South India:

- Through people – We’ve had scores of people go from our church to Karnataka, and each time I go I see or hear of the impact they have made, starting in the 1970s with Dr. Rebekah Naylor.
- Through prayer – Our church has prayed for this part of India for decades, but in the last 5-6 years we have earnestly prayed for the work in the Mandya district. When our first team went there 6 years ago, we personally experienced the fierce persecution. We have prayed for the believers in a handful of churches. Those churches are multiplying dramatically, and many are being saved and baptized. Prayer is making the difference.
- Through provision – Our church currently pays the salaries for five church planters who are working in Mandya. I was able to spend an entire day teaching and encouraging those men and others they are developing. It’s amazing how God is using them. But last November our church gave \$60,000 through our Harvest Day offering to assist the India Baptist Society with an expansion to their little building to provide space for training (SLIDES). By God’s grace, permission has been granted to begin construction and I was privileged to lay the first stone as a representative of our church.

You need to know that your lives, your praying, your giving is making a real difference in the nation of India that is growing by an amount equivalent to the population of the state of Texas every year.

Now open your Bibles please to Philippians 2:19 (Pew Bible pg.1162). As I think of the work in India I think of the church at Philippi. The Apostle Paul had a beautiful relationship with the church at Philippi. He had taken the Gospel to them on one of his missionary journeys through what is now northern Greece. In spite of great persecution, a church was born and began to thrive. They felt so blessed that they wanted to be a blessing to others, so they invested people, prayer and provision in the work of spreading the Gospel through the apostle. Some of the willing people involved in the work are spoken of by Paul. Read text.

VIDEO ILLUSTRATION – Difference between a cruise ship and a battleship. On a battleship everyone has a job to do. I don’t do your job, you don’t do my job, unless one or the other of us needs some help. If you don’t do your job or I don’t do my job, the ship won’t function the way it should. On a battleship everyone has the same mission, understands that mission and works to achieve that mission. On a battleship everyone is an employee ... everyone. There are very few, if any spectators. Battleships travel to places that may not always be friendly and are often times dangerous. When the people on a battleship aren’t actively engaged in combat they’re training for battle.

Things are different on a cruise ship. It's to get away from work. Take a vacation and have fun. This is a place people go to just to kick back and relax. Most cruise ships travel to nice places to visit and see. On a cruise everything revolves around your comfort, convenience and entertainment. There is a small group of employees whose sole job it is to make the passengers happy and meet their every need. Most people onboard are simply along for the ride.

The difference between the battleship and the cruise ship is the nature of their mission

The church in Philippi was a battleship church, not a cruise ship church. And there were two men in particular who exemplified this spirit of service ... Timothy and Epaphroditus. Paul writes about their exemplary service to Christ and to His church. What is it that made them so essential to the ministry of the church and to the ministry of the Apostle? My prayer today is that the Holy Spirit will inspire you to a life a service in and through the church.

Servants of Christ are essential to a healthy church. Here are some characteristics of Christ's servants:

1. CHRIST'S SERVANTS ARE AVAILABLE.

They are available to the Lord and to the Lord's leaders and to the Lord's people as servants of the church

What did they do? They carried messages and materials back and forth between Paul and the church in Philippi. In short, they were errand boys.

TIMOTHY - Philippians 2:19 - I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you.

EPAPHRODITUS Philippians 2:25 - 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.

Now that doesn't sound like much ... carrying messages back and forth. Don't underestimate the value of what is happening here.

If they had not done this, Paul could not have communicated his message to the church in Philippi. The church would have missed out on important truth. And we would miss out on it as well, since we would not have this portion of God's Word to study this morning. We would not have these examples to look at.

Don't overlook or underestimate the value of what may seem to be insignificant acts of service. Examples: Mentoring a boy or a girl, caring for preschoolers during worship, helping people in the parking lot, giving a ride to children whose parents don't come to church ... and on and on.

When we stand before the Lord as the people of God of all the ages in heaven, and the Lord distributes rewards, we're going to be surprised at what He thinks of something so simple as giving a cup of cold water to someone in His name.

You cannot serve God without serving each other. If you say you are available to God then you will be available to the needs of others in the church.

1 John 4:20 - If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.

What this verse says is that being available to God is the same as being available to others in the Body of Christ.

Start the day with the prayer, "Lord I am available to You. My time, my money, my words, my life ... it's all Yours." And then really let Him use you.

NOTE: Now this is a rather weird way to look at this, and I'm hesitant to speak of it because it may seem a little self-serving. Please know that's not my intention at all. It is simply to point out that here are two guys who made their "pastor" a very happy man. Why? Because they were available to him (to Paul) to help him with his ministry. And it wasn't just for Paul ... it was because they loved the church.

Imagine what would happen if this attitude pervaded our church. Imagine what would happen in our church. Would it not be like the early church in Acts?

Acts 4:34-35 - There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

Everyone was available ... they made all they possessed available to the work of the church. They submitted to the spiritual leaders in the church and yielded their resources because they really cared about the church.

Imagine what would happen in our city if we unleashed a couple thousand Christ-followers who were eager to serve. Imagine the message that would send to the lost and suffering in our city.

Christ's servants are available. But also ...

2. CHRIST'S SERVANTS ARE THOUGHTFUL.

They think about the needs of other people. About Timothy ...

Philippians 2:20-21 - I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

Two things to notice here:

- Timothy was truly interested in the well-being of people in the church.
- And when you're interested in the well-being of the people in the church, it's the same as being interested in the work of Christ. You can't separate the two. Do you see that?

God put it on Paul's heart to involve Timothy and Epaphroditus in a work, and in essence, when they said yes to Paul they were saying yes to Christ. And they were doing it from a thoughtful heart. This who passage drips with thoughtfulness:

We see thoughtfulness in the feelings that are spoken of in the instance of Epaphroditus.

Philippians 2:25 - But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus...

Philippians 2:26 - For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill.

Philippians 2:27 - 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.

Now here's the story: Epaphroditus was sent by the Philippian church to Rome to help Paul. Why? Because they wanted to care for his needs. And why were they distressed about Epaphroditus' illness? Because they loved him. And why was Paul so concerned about Epaphroditus? Because he truly cared about this man.

Earlier it mentions that Paul wanted to keep Timothy with him. Why? Because Timothy loved Paul and was a great help and encouragement to him.

ILLUSTRATION – Noel and Ruth Jacobs have been part of church for many years, and they are moving to Mississippi. This is their last Sunday. We're going to miss them because they were both involved in service.

Have you made yourself that valuable to other people? Have you served in such a way that others would grieve if they suddenly found out that you were not going to be there?

That's the kind of church we need to be. If something happened and each of us was suddenly taken from this city, the city would say, "Wow, what are we going to do without them?"

Christ's servants are available, thoughtful, and...

3. CHRIST'S SERVANTS ARE RELIABLE.

You can count on people like this. You know that when they're asked to do something they can be counted it on to see things through to completion.

TIMOTHY - Philippians 2:22 - 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.

Here's an important principle. You may not feel adequate, but you can learn to serve if someone will show you. Timothy served with Paul. He learned to serve from Paul. If you're involved in a ministry, look around to see who else you can involve whom you can teach.

EPAPHRODITUS - Philippians 2:25 - But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus...

I'm impressed with the fact that Paul could send Epaphroditus back. He had proven time and time again that he was faithful.

Philippians 2:25 - 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.

Note: Look at those words "fellow worker" and "fellow soldier." There's a prefix attached to the front of each of those words that indicates they're not just a worker, but a worker that helps another in and with their work. And a fellow soldier is not just a soldier, but a soldier who fights alongside another soldier. It's one thing to be a worker; it's another thing to be a "fellow-worker." It's one thing to be a soldier; it's another thing to be a "fellow-soldier."

We need to be able to count on each other in this way. We've got a lot of tired servants and soldiers around here because they don't have any fellow workers and fellow soldiers.

I'm impressed that Timothy and Epaphroditus didn't let their own well-being affect their reliable service. It wasn't something easy for them. They were serving with a number of other things swirling around them. They both had personal difficulties that did not hinder their service.

EPAPHRODITUS - Philippians 2:27 - 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.

Philippians 2:30 - because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

These kinds of servants are reliable because you know that they're not going to quit when things get a little rough for them.

And you rarely hear these kinds of servants complaining. I've taken mental note of the fact through the years as a pastor that the people who are complainers are generally not too involved in service. The kind of servants I've been talking about today just don't have much time or energy or inclination to complain about things. They're too involved in serving others to care much about any inconveniences that they may encounter.

The last thing I want you to see about Christ's servants is that ...

4. SERVANTS ARE VALUED.

God honors them by rewarding them. We should honor their service in the church.

EPAPHRODITUS - Philippians 2:29 - Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him,

Philippians 2:30 - because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

These are to be the heroes among us. Not that they are the people who are doing all the work and the rest of us watch and applaud them. No! They are leaders who ought to inspire us to greater heights of service.

CONCLUSION

Now this is a spiritual matter. When you're serving in this way you are serving Christ. And if you're not serving Christ there's something wrong in your spiritual life.

Romans 12:11 - Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

To put it bluntly, if you're not involved in actively serving Christ through His church you're not right with God. You're lacking in zeal and in spiritual fervor.

My intent is not just to make you feel bad. I want you to repent and begin to obey Christ in this matter. That's the first thing.

Then I want you to do something about it. Tonight at 6pm in the South Complex we're having a service rally. You'll find dozens of ministries represented. Come and talk with someone involved in the ministry, pray about it and then sign up to begin serving.