
UNBROKEN JOY
MISSION IN REAL TIME
Philippians 2:17-30

Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me. I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

This is God's word, and as we open it today we come to a passage that we might not typically go to for a study. Part of our commitment as a local church is to study the word of God verse by verse, chapter by chapter. So we are taking the book of Philippians and we are working our way through. One of the reasons we do that is that it brings us to passages of scripture that we might not on our own select to study. That brings up topics and issues that are very helpful for us, because we might not choose to study certain things if we just chose to go to the passages that we wanted to.

Today is an example of that, because what we have here is Paul describing for us the mission activity of the Church. He is giving us a real time look at how the Church is built, and how he and his team members are working to build the church at Philippi. The result is Paul describing to them,

Unbroken Joy - Mission In Real Time

Philippians 2:17-30 | Sunday, September 6, 2015 | By Brian Brookins



saying, “Hey, guys – here I am. I’m in prison. I’m in prison because I’m preaching the gospel and telling people about Jesus Christ. And I wish I could come to you, but I’m tied up. Literally.”... That was supposed to be kind of funny. It didn’t really have that effect, did it? “I am not able to come and see you, so who can I send? Well, you know Timothy – he’s really the one I depend on the most. He’s the one person that I know can go and truly represent me. But I can’t quite send him because I really need him right now. Before I can send him, I need to wait and see what happens to me, so I will send Epaphroditus to you.” Now, Epaphroditus was one of their own. He had traveled all the way from Philippi to Rome to bring a gift from them to support Paul and to help him during his imprisonment. He almost died in the process. They thought they were going to lose him, but God spared him, and now Paul is going to send him back, carrying the letter of Philippians.

So, we have this description and when you think about it, you have four chapters. It’s a short letter, and half of one of those chapters, at least 1/8th of the book, describes these activities. We could ask ourselves, “Does this really have anything to do with us? It’s kind of logistical in nature.” But I think it has a lot to teach us, because we see that the Church is on mission to build the Church and to tell people about Jesus Christ. If God has saved you and if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, God has given you a mission. He has commanded you to go and make disciples.

We saw two individuals baptized today in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. That’s the first step of discipleship. We come to a place where we trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sin. We understand that we can’t save ourselves. The scripture is very clear: God will judge sin and the penalty of that sin is death. We are unable to pay it ourselves. We lack the righteous ability to do exactly and perfectly what God commands. God, in his love, in his mercy, has given his Son to pay the penalty of our sin. When he saves us, he comes in and he gives us new life. He makes all things new. His Spirit lives within us, and now, Church, we live not just for our personal comfort, for our eternal security, we live on mission. We live to make Christ known, to make this good message heard wherever we are.

God has called us to a mission. Riverside Church: God has done a marvelous thing here. This is really a great church. If I weren’t the pastor here, I would join it myself. I recommend it to you if you are looking for a church. Unapologetically, I recommend it. Why? Because God has done an amazing thing!

There are certain values that are on display all around you. We sold a stand-alone building in Coral Springs so that we could buy this shopping center. Well, we believe that the New Testament preaches that the people are the temple of God. The people are the building of God. You are where God dwells. It’s not about a facility. If you look at this place and you say, “Well, it’s not all

that impressive" - good! The question is: Are you impressive? Because God is dwelling in his people!

We wanted a model where it was functional, it was practical, it was done well, but it freed us financially to put more and more money into ministry, to give bays to Hope Women's Center and office space to Hope Women's Center. We wanted a model where we could position ourselves to attract all kinds of people. We didn't want to just be white middle/upper middle class. We wanted to be white middle/upper middle class, but we also wanted to be non-white, non-middle class, every class, every class of education, every class of financial standing, every race imaginable, because this represents God's creation and we are called to come together as one body and to worship him.

We recognize that that's swimming upstream to some degree. We are more comfortable being with other people who are just like ourselves. But I believe that in the hearts of God's people, when they come together with a very diverse group of people and they get stretched because they are around people who are different, there is something within them that resonates, that says, "This is right!" This is right. What unites us is not just common interests, where we are all about the NFL, and we are all about this, and we are all about that. (I don't know if you know it, but football season is getting ready to start.) That's not what unites us together -- it's the Lord Jesus Christ!

Like never before, in my lifetime, we are living in an age where we need to see Jesus Christ on display as that which brings down barriers and unites God's creation. These features of church life are on display all the time. But really, we would have to say that in significant ways, those are secondary. Those are distinctives. We could talk about the theology. We are an evangelical church. We believe in the bible. We believe in reformed doctrine, the great doctrines of God's grace. Grace alone. Christ alone. Scripture alone. Faith alone. We believe in the work of the Holy Spirit. These are theological distinctives.

Now we are moving closer to the core of who we are. Because who we are is: we are followers of Jesus Christ. We are Christian. So we address difficult social issues. We don't ignore the issues of abortion. We believe God has told us to have the courage to speak the truth, but to do it according to the Spirit of Christ, in a way that's not demeaning or disrespectful, but loving - courage cloaked or clothed in the gentleness of Jesus Christ. This is who we are, church. Riverside: We are on a mission. We are on a mission to make Jesus Christ known according to scriptural truth, according to the power of the Spirit of God. We are giving our lives for people to come into relationship with Jesus Christ, to be discipled, to be taught everything that Jesus taught and commanded.

We come to a passage like this and we see Paul behind the scenes building, working, and I want to identify three things here, three things that we need if we are on mission together, three things needed to build the Church.

#1 -- The first is confidence in God. The first is faith. Paul begins with God. Just consider for a moment that Paul is in prison. Paul is in prison, and yet as he writes about his plans notice verse 19: "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you..." Again, verse 24: "...I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also." Do you hear as Paul talks about his plans, he is planning in the Lord? By that, he means that all of his plans and what he hopes to do are ultimately up to Jesus. He is praying about it, he is planning, he is setting a course, but really what finally happens is up to Christ. His destiny and his fate, the fate of his life are up to God.

I would suggest to you that many of us, if we were in Paul's place, would be talking about Caesar. We would be saying, "You know, I'm here. I'm on trial. The trial has begun. I'm on trial because I have proclaimed Christ and there is this whole controversy that has come about. Am I undermining the Roman government?" Imagine that: This little old rabbi, Paul, being accused of undermining Rome. And there he is, preaching this message. He doesn't say, "Well, once Caesar decides what to do with me..." "Once Caesar makes his decision..." No, he doesn't even mention Nero. He's talking about God. His life is in the hands of God.

When we sold our building in Coral Springs and moved here, we had a property in another city that we had a contract on and we were buying that property. Because the building codes changed last minute, it made it impossible financially to build out that building in that city. We actually were called in before the city manager and the city attorney of another city. We had hired a specialist in city government, an attorney. He went with me, and I sat there. The city manager looked at me and he said, "You know what? We don't want you here. We are going to do everything we can to keep you from buying property here. We don't want a church. We don't want you to take property off the tax rolls."

I remember just sitting there in shock, and then in anger, leaving. The attorney that we had hired was an unbeliever. He was a God-fearing man, he was a Jewish man, and he was angry. He said to me in that moment, "Hey listen, Brian, let's sue them. Let's call the ACLU and sue them." I said, "Sam, I know this is going to surprise you, but the ACLU is not usually the partner I go to when I'm looking for legal help."

When we began to implement the plan to come to a place where there would be a different financial model and a more diverse church, we didn't anticipate that there would be so many obstacles that we faced -- that maybe cities would actually oppose us. I remember falling into real doubt and concern. "Is this even going to happen? Will I be known as the man who killed this great church in Coral Springs?"

Then when we found this property, I remember calling our city attorney, and him saying to me on the telephone, "Brian, if you want to buy this property, I need to tell you I can't represent you because I'm the city attorney for the city of North Lauderdale, where that property is located. However, I think as a city attorney I will be more help, and the good news is you won't even have to pay for it."

The city manager was a born again Christian and he had been praying for God to bring a church to this area. The city manager was a believer. The city attorney was our attorney. The mayor was a born again, tongue-talking, Spirit-filled Christian. The three individuals that we needed approval from were so eager for us to become a part of this community. In fact, as soon as we signed the contract, the city manager met with me and said, "Brian, you guys will have the only facility large enough to house a charter school that we have a charter to start. We need to rent back your building from you. We will help pay for the build-out, and we will expedite all the permits.

In order to build the Church, we need confidence in God. We need to know that if we are sitting in prison, and that we may be executed, God builds his Church. God is able. God is willing. God is eager. God is eager to build your life in Christ, your marriage in Christ, your family, and he calls you to a mission in the Church. Even when the circumstances are very challenging, God wants to demonstrate his ability.

The year that Paul is writing is somewhere around AD 60, AD 61. It's near the end of Paul's life. We don't know exactly when Paul died, but we don't hear anything from him after about AD 64, or maybe even earlier. That's significant because, do you know what happened in AD 64? There was a big fire in Rome. There was this massive, destructive fire, and three of the major sections of Rome, maybe 12 or 14 sections in Rome were completely destroyed. The fire went on for five full days. Seven of the sections were significantly damaged. Nero was away. When he came to Rome, he led the effort to put out the fires.

But then there were rumors that Nero was behind the starting of the fires, that he had had them started because he wanted to rebuild Rome according to his own desires. Nero needed a scapegoat, and he chose the Christians. There was a terrible persecution of the entire church in Rome. Thousands of Christians were executed. Tacitus tells us in his writings that they took the Christians and sewed them in animal skins and then, with their hands and feet bound, they were fed to wild animals and beasts. Their bodies were used as human torches. As the sun would go down, Christians would be set on fire.

The Church was born in the midst of these impossible odds, where in the capital of the world, Christianity was being opposed and ridiculed and mocked. Months, a couple of years after the book of Philippians was written, we suspect but we don't know that Paul was vindicated in his trial. He was acquitted and released. He labored for another couple of years then he was probably executed in that persecution in Rome. But we don't know. The point is that the Church was born in the midst of adversity, and it thrived because God will build his Church. If we are going to build the Church we need to have faith. You see it in remarkable ways.

There is one last application before we go to our second observation. It's this whole thing about Epaphroditus almost dying. It's very interesting. Here's a man, Paul, who had seen God work miracles through his life, miracles of healing, and yet he tells us that Epaphroditus almost died and that God chose to have mercy on him. Notice that he doesn't blame the near death experience of Epaphroditus on a lack of faith. He doesn't claim that God healed him because of the expression of their faith. It's just a matter of fact -- he almost died and God had mercy on him. It reminds us of a very great principle. Paul taught it in 1 Corinthians 12, that all the gifts of the Spirit come from the Spirit, who distributes them according to his will, according to his sovereign will. The work and activity of the Spirit of God is decided by God, distributed by God, according to the measure of God, according to his will. There is a place where we just learn to submit to God and to have confidence in him. We need confidence in God. We need faith.

#2 - Sacrifice. We see in these verses a description of tremendous human sacrifice. Paul has been teaching us in this whole passage a theme that is recorded in verses 3 and 4. Philippians 2:3: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." He is writing pastorally, if you will, to the church at Philippi and he is concerned for their spiritual

health. He is concerned about problems of division and doctrinal soundness. He writes, "Listen, I want you to live in humility. I want you to think about others and not just yourselves." He is giving illustrations. He gave the great model of Jesus himself and we looked at that model.

Now in these verses he talks about himself. He talks about Timothy, and he talks about Epaphroditus. In some ways, all three of those men are held up as an example of what it means to live considering the interests of others, and not just the interests of yourself. Paul says in verse 17: "Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all." Do you hear what Paul is saying? He is using the image of a sacrifice and he is saying, "I am being poured out like a drink offering." A sacrifice would be made on the altar, and then a drink offering would be poured on top. Paul was there in prison. It's as if he is saying, "Listen, I know I'm in a vulnerable place, and I may be executed. Maybe right now I should be thinking about me. Maybe I should be thinking about my own preservation and my own survival, but I'm thinking about you. And if I'm being spent and poured out so that your faith will grow and benefit, I am okay with that." If you find yourself in service to God, saying "What will be left of me?" then follow the example of Paul and say, "I'm okay, Lord. Pour me out for the benefit of other people." The Church is built.

Then he held up the example of Timothy. Timothy is referred to by Paul as a son to himself. We read, "He seeks the interests of others and not himself." He really is seeking the interest of Christ. He is serving with Paul and he is serving Paul. There is a place where in the Church we serve one another and we help other people be successful in ministry. As we do that, the Church is built.

I know that Beth and I would say that from the very beginning of our ministry and the call of God on our lives, at significant times significant people have come in and said, "We will help you. We will help you build this church. We will help you get started. We will help you in various ways. We will help you adopt. We believe in what God is doing here." All around, you can look and see people helping other people, coming in at significant moments. Timothy was that kind of man for Paul. He gave his life in service to Paul. It's such a biblical principle and at times, tragically, it's abused, where people are taken advantage of. But we shouldn't overreact to the abuses. God calls us to serve one another.

Epaphroditus is given as an example. We are told that he served to the point of death; traveling in that day, great danger, great sacrifice. He nearly died. He is held up as an example. Then there is

the example of the Philippians themselves. This church was born out of the generosity of Lydia. Do you remember that she was the first convert in Europe? She came to faith in Christ and immediately said, "Listen, I'm going to open up my home. Please, come to my home." The church was probably started in her home. This church supported Paul. They helped him do the work at Thessalonica. They helped him do the work at Corinth. They sent him help when he was in prison. They took a collection to send to the Jerusalem saints when they were in poverty and in need. The church had a pattern of generosity and sacrifice. In fact, the book of Philippians is a thank you letter. Paul receives this gift from Epaphroditus, from the Philippians, and he sends back this letter, saying, "thank you." And that's how the book will end in Chapter 4. Sacrifice. God calls us to sacrifice.

There is an important point of application here. We invite people to give their lives in service to Christ. Sometimes we lack courage to do that. But I want to tell you that Christianity regularly employs the vocabulary of recruitment. We invite people to follow Jesus Christ and to give their lives completely to him and in service to him. Sometimes it's volunteering at Hope Women's Center. Sometimes it's saying, "Look, I'm going to this walk. I'm going to get some sponsors." It's very simple ways. Other times, it's "Let me help in the nursery." Let me just release you. You don't need an audible voice of God, a word of God to volunteer in the nursery. All you need is a background check. God calls us to serve. He calls us to consider the interests of others, and not just our own interests.

When we come to hear the word of God, we are not coming just to say "What do I need? What helps me? What interests me?" But on top of it, "How am I going to be equipped to help other people?" So today, the message is: I am called to mission, and I need the courage and the faith to call other people to mission. Jesus Christ is worthy of your entire life! Give it to him. Give it in service to him.

Kent Hughes tells of a young man who came home from the war and his very elderly mom sent someone to pick him up. This person didn't know the son and he said to the aging mom, "How will I know your son?" She said to him, "He will be the one who is helping someone else." The man went and he saw a soldier getting off the train, helping an elderly lady with her bags. He went up and inquired, "Are you who I am looking for?" and he was. Have a reputation of giving your life for someone else.

We had a man here who led worship. He was a very unusual man. His name was Butch. He moved up north many years ago now. For some reason, in order to work the pedals of his guitar, he would take his shoes off when he led worship. So he was the barefooted worship leader -- that was his claim to fame. He was a man who had a gift of giving. He worked at a software company and, unexpectedly, shares from that company became his and he began to give generously. As God increased in his life, he didn't use that increase to get a better this, a faster that, a bigger this. He just gave generously.

I remember right after we had bought this building, we were struggling to make the financial transition. We were \$40,000 in the hole and we had projected that we would be another \$40,000 before we got to where we needed to be. The pastors were praying in my office. Butch came to the office, knocked on the door and interrupted us. Some of you have heard this story. I was irritated. "We can't even pray without someone's interrupting us." Butch came in. He said, "Listen, God told me there was a financial need and I just came by to see if I could help." "Oh! Glad you're here!" He came in, called his wife, wrote a check for \$40,000, and asked the church to match it. You would be incorrect to think that this man didn't make a significant sacrifice to write that check, that he didn't trade some financial security or personal comfort for the mission of the Church of Jesus Christ. The Church is built of human sacrifice.

Terry Peacock works in our sound booth. He works so much that Adam tells me "Let's pay him." And I say, "I would love to, but he's such a great example of voluntary service." Thank you, Terry. Thank you for the way that in a thankless job, you give your time and serve the Lord. The Church is built by faith and sacrifice.

#3 -- Finally, you need one more element, and that is: You need people. We see here a description of deep and difficult relationships. People will delight you. Consider Paul's words regarding Epaphroditus: He is my brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier. He is your messenger. He is your minister, which means servant. He has this longing to be with you. He is distressed because you heard that he was ill. We almost lost him. That would have meant sorrow upon sorrow for me. You will rejoice when you see him. I will rejoice when you see him. I will be less anxious. The Lord will fill us with joy. I want you to honor him. Listen to all this weeping and laughing and prayer and sorrow upon sorrow -- deep, significant relationships. He has risked his life for you. People will delight you.

In the same passage he talks about Timothy, his deep personal affection for Timothy. He is like a son to me. He has proven his worth. He is one of a kind. We build together. People are God's program. We are not just building a service, or this group, or that class. We are building people. That's God's program. We are discipling one another. People will delight you.

People will also disappoint you. When Paul says, "I want to send Timothy to you," he says, "I have no one like him, no one who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. They all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ." Now, that seems a little pitiful, doesn't it? And yet I think in one respect Paul is saying, "Of the people I have here in Rome, Timothy is unique." But I think in another respect he is expressing some disappointment that there aren't more people ready to say, "God, send me. Send me. I'm ready. I'm ready to go wherever you tell me to go. I'm ready to do whatever you tell me to do."

The scripture is just so transparent, so real for us. It tells us about all of the challenges of relationship, that relationships are not automatic. They are not immediate. As we build together, we irritate together. We agitate at times one another. We legitimately disagree. Our flaws come to the surface and there are challenges. Yet, we need to be reminded that there is no flock without the sheep. It's like the pastor who said, "Lord, I would be a great shepherd except for the sheep." We need one another. We need the people. We need to invest in one another.

Paul gives us this amazing word picture and I want to call your attention to it as we prepare to close the message. He said, "I am a drink offering. I am being poured out on the sacrifice of your faith." What he is saying there is, "You are the sacrifice. I'm calling on you, Philippians, to get on the altar of God and to lay down your life in service to God. My sacrifice is for you to have faith to sacrifice yourselves, so that the main thing is you. But it's not all about you -- it's about you having the faith to give yourself."

I'm going to trust that the Holy Spirit will help you examine and look at your own life. Say, "Lord, give me excitement about the mission of making you known in this world. Give me excitement about the mission at Riverside. Help me connect relationally." You know the ways that you have right before you in church life and in your life. "Lord, how do you want me to serve? How do you want me to show your mercy? How do you want me to hold out the word of life? People are your program. Discipleship is your strategy. Lord, faith, sacrifice, people. I want to embrace these as we enjoin in mission."

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