

Kings Norton Baptist Church

Sunday 19th March 2023 10 am

Epaphroditus - Philippians 2:25-30

Welcome to all.

Opening Scripture

Hymn MP 45 At your feet we fall mighty risen Lord

Scripture Proverbs 3 (page 637)

Chorus MP 1022 Above all powers

Prayer of praise and thanksgiving.

Children's talk Body combining the parts Quote from 1 Cor 12?

Welcome new members

Notices

Mission focus

Prayer time

Reading Philippians 2:25- 30 (page 1180)
James 2:14-26 (page 1214) (see also 2 Corinthians 9:9-15
(page 1163))

Hymn MP 1109 Thank you for the cross Lord

Sermon **Epaphroditus – active faith**

Hymn MP 476 My Lord what love is this

Closing Prayer from back of the book

Close

A church stuck in time – Bulletin

“James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognised the grace given to me. Gal 2:9



1a

Exordium and Prayer

■ As a teenager I shared a house with three others, two men were older, Harry, drink and smoke, 'under the doctor' always sitting down inactive

It made me think I never want to be inactive in my life, Nor now as Christian.

This sermon is entitled *Active faith*, x2 - it could also be *love in action*, either.

We continue in the letter the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, in modern day Macedonia at the top of the Aegean sea.

It's a letter people like to read because it often says 'rejoice', we like that. But Paul said it because they weren't rejoicing! Maybe the Lord has to say that to you and I this morning. Maybe the troubles you are experiencing have caused you to wobble in the race the Lord has called you to, and the joy had gone. Probably.

So what was happening with the church in Philippi and why did Paul write as he did? Paul commends the church for being a gospel church, so should we be. We should be bringers of gospel light, light bearers pressing into the dark world around. We should be those that understand the Gospel, hold out the arm of appeal to all those we can, not forgetting that the gospel is both an appeal - and a warning. Christ's resurrection has put the world on notice.

The believers in this church saw Paul as the champion of the faith. Now the shock news has come that he is in prison in Rome. Can you hear the "Oh no, what now?" rippling through the church? Paul has to say a few things:

1. Firstly God is in charge, He is on the throne in heaven - trust him.
2. This has not turned out to hinder the gospel - but to advance it.
3. This has meant that others have stepped up, others have been bolder.
4. This is exactly what we should expect to happen if we are to follow Christ. Paul loves them and wants to encourage them. So he not only writes to them - but sends Timothy to them, we looked at that last time 2:19-24.

✚ Paul may be in his prison cell - but he is active in every way he can.

But what about the church how did the believers respond after the initial shock had died down? Fits of depression? What would we have done?

✚ What do we do when you hear of a brother or sister in distress?

There are so many around the world and the Missionary magazines bring news of their gruelling circumstances. What do we do? Pray a little, maybe that's about it, we don't know them personally so there's little impact.

What about if we do know them as the church at Philippi knew Paul.

1b

Paul, the Apostle who brought the Gospel to the non-Jews saw the Church started in Philippi. So when they heard he was in prison what did they do? Send a card? Send an email saying we are praying for you? Send some money, that's easy isn't it.

✚ What did they do? They sent the pastor, the pastor went.

Epaphroditus who is also your messenger Yes it looks like he is their pastor, the next use of the word translated 'messenger' is in Revelation as Jesus speaks to the angels or messengers, the pastors of the seven churches.

The church there wanted to help but they were far away. It would have been easy to look at the obstacles, at the difficulties, and do nothing, and leave it to others, someone else will help. No, not them. "how can we help" they prayed and prayer does something – in me - they sent one of their own. v25 **whom you sent to take care of my needs.** It was not someone convenient and local but one of their own. He went to **make up for the help you could not give me.** v30.

✚ Here we see 'active faith'

Here is faith in action. Not only did **Epaphroditus** go but he bore their gifts.

Look across to Phil 4:18 and you see the only other reference to this man. **I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.**

Yes those gifts would have taken time and effort to prepare, it was done out of love - and love can never be passive - it acts. They were generous gifts, there is nothing token about these gifts as many are, just to impress or appease a conscience. Paul says he **received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied.** In prison in those days much of what they needed to live on had to be provided for by the family or by friends, there would be a number who went without, yet not Paul, because the body of Christ is functioning as a body. One part helping another.

It didn't just happen, this gift had to be organised and arranged. The Christians at Philippi gave their beloved **Epaphroditus** - and they gave cash. That is Roman coinage, maybe some silver denarius, perhaps clothing.

✚ The church's love if genuine had to show in action x2. Inactive faith does not exist, inactive faith is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms.

They took seriously the principle that gospel carrier should be supported by those who received the gospel as they had. It was faith stretching for them, they may not have been wealthy, Paul describes it as **an acceptable sacrifice.**

2a

Yes this giving was part of their worship **a fragrant offering, ... pleasing to God.** Here is OT language for worship

✚ Giving is part of our worship x2.

When Paul spoke to the Corinthian Christians about their gift to the believers in Jerusalem he said: **On the first day of every week, - That's Sunday, today - each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up,** 1 Cor 16:1-2

That is why before the lockdown we used to have the offering bags brought round. Now a number transfer money directly into the church's bank account. I wonder for those that do if on Sunday you think "Lord that transfer is my worship to you and given in thanks for all you have blessed me with". How easy to forget it.

Now we have an offering box on the stairs at the back. I do not involve myself with the church's finances, but I can tell you this - that box does need to be the size it is.

■ In Suriname the church we went to had a basket draped in cloth at the front at the front, like a large upturned hat. At a certain point in the service we were invited to come forward with our offering. Everyone got up and came forward and put in their offering.

As a pastor I obviously thought; "is that a good idea or a bad idea". What do you think? I thought no-one would want to stay seated where they are. I guessed that those reluctant to give would get up and join the others and come past the basket and just put a little in so as to be seen to be giving along with the rest, no-one wants to be embarrassed. This system forces people I thought.

Should one shame others into giving? – Paul did it. He said to the Corinthian church "look at the Macedonian church, see how they have given, and generously, even out of their poverty". But giving – if it is to be acceptable it must be from the heart. **Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**

It is a test for us all - Christians these days do not give as our parents or grandparents generation did, not by a long way. And the work of God suffers.

✚ Your giving – is an indicator of your faith. x2

That is why Paul starts by saying: "**Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.**

2b

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.” 2 Cor 9:6-11

So Paul says to the church here in Philippi, the next verse: 4:19 **“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”**

Do you believe the Lord will supply all you need? Do I believe the Lord will supply all my needs? – my generosity, or lack of it, reflects the amount I trust Him.

- As a church we give little, we’re used to it like this, how will you pay your next pastor when the time comes?

Don’t we trust God and pray expecting Him to act on His promises?

- Hawkesley Pri. School – Go round each class and speak about prayer
- We prayed with Zaynab after the Bible study about her work situation and a big bill, and the next day we heard it had been reduced. Also her work shifts had changed. But more importantly Zaynab was very changed in her view of the work.

- ✚ The believers in Philippi, in exercising their faith, act, they act.

Faith without action shows there is no faith. We should never do as I heard someone here say to another last week “I hope all goes well with you”.

The church at Philippi did not say “we wish you well Paul keep warm and we hope you have enough to eat”. That is to expose dead faith says James. **“faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”** James 2:17

Let us trust the Lord to provide as we read in Proverbs 3: **“Honour the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops;” “then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.”** Prov 3:9,10

Last week we sang *trust and obey*, the third verse said: *But we never can prove the delights of his love until all on the altar we lay.*

The journey

We have mentioned the church’s gift but then there is the long hard journey. And carrying gifts makes a hard journey worse with the fear of robbery.

Yet there is always a point when you have to go, to act, to leave the house, to step out to help someone, to visit someone, to meet with other believers – for their good.

And for Epaphroditus there was the very real prospect of illness: 27 **Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him....**

So why didn’t the Apostle heal him? Paul was endued with a power of curing diseases, as well as raising the dead. Ac 20:10. But these miracles were sign miracles, a sign to others of Paul’s apostolic authority to speak Christ’s words and to confirm the truth of the gospel. (Mr 16:17,18.). Paul did not heal Epaphroditus any more than he healed himself when ill in Galatia, or let himself out of jail for that matter.

Let us trust Him - *trust and obey*, the second verse said: *Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share, but our toil he doth richly repay; not a grief or a loss, not a frown or a cross, but is blest if we trust and obey.*

- ✚ Epaphroditus’ visit to Paul must have seemed like Christ himself.

Every true believer is being moulded, formed to be like Jesus Christ. That is the fundamental reason why what is happening to you - is happening!

Paul describes him as **my brother, fellow-worker, fellow-soldier,**

Can you see here something of Christ in Epaphroditus?

Is not Jesus our **brother**? One who came on that long journey from heaven? For how else could he help Adam’s helpless race, he became one of us to redeem lost men and women. You did not go to him, he came to you.

He showed the love of God in coming for sinners, nothing good to come for, our sin is a stench in his nostrils, yet he came. And He gave.

Did he not come bearing gifts. But like **Epaphroditus** Jesus gave himself.

That precious costly gift, Christ the suffering servant laying down his Holy life that other could freely share in the glories and gifts of heaven. **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** 2 Cor 5:21

I wonder if some here have not grasped the tremendous sacrifice Jesus the Son of God gave. All so that you could freely receive forgiveness of sins.

No man or woman can approach God as we are, there are no good people, not one, - we desperately need what we do not have - and that is **righteousness**. Many are the self-righteousness. No we need **the righteousness of God**. and that is free to the repentant sinner. Have you fallen before him and pleaded with him to received it? If you haven’t yet then do not delay, make sure you do. And when you do you will come up oh so different you will be changed.

That is why we have welcomed these three because we **recognised the grace given to them**. Christ came bearing gifts – and it cost him greatly.

Jesus was that gift, he gave up his own body, **a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God**.

He is our **fellow-worker** in doing the work for us carrying away the burden of sin on the cross.

He is our **fellow-soldier**, championing victoriously against our great enemy death and judgment and setting us free.

Epaphroditus came to Paul in prison so Christ comes to us in our prison. **“The Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.** Gal 3:22-23

Paul said of **Epaphroditus whom you sent to take care of my needs**.

So the Lord God gave his best his only Son Jesus Christ to take care of my greatest need, the forgiveness of sins and friendship with God. Now in him all my needs are met. In him the bread of life I hunger no more, In him the living water I thirst no more. He has and will supply ALL my needs according to his riches. Wonderful – Let us trust him.

✚ **Now Christ has come let us live by faith in Him and show it in our deeds.**

There are some who profess faith but it is very hard to find out what they do for the Lord. As good deeds cannot be hidden - one wonders where they are.

Will you be one to whom the Lord welcomes into heaven with those words **well done good and faithful servant**” or will you crawl in with your eyes down, or not even be there at all - your lack of deeds - reveal an empty faith.

We spoke about shame earlier, Paul finishes his letter to the Church in Thessalonica calling them to note those inactive in their faith, in other words disobedience. **“If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed.”** 2 Thess 3:14. *I have yet to see a church do this BTW!!*

But he also notices those who live differently that paper has another column: look on to Phil 3:17 **Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.**

Paul, who sent him back to them, says to the church: **v29 Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour men like him.** He is saying to them you should be glad to have such an example within your midst, honour him.

And why: **30 because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life ...**

It seems he had caught his illness in the work of God, he is living out his faith before them all. **the work of Christ - not regarding his life: AV**

✚ **MH says: Those who truly love Christ, and are hearty in the interests of his kingdom, will think it very well worth their while to hazard their health and life to do him service, and promote the edification of his church.**

Epaphroditus did. *Trust and obey*, the fourth verse said: *Then in fellowship sweet, we will sit at his feet, or we'll walk by his side in the way; what he says we will do, where he sends we will go; never fear, only trust and obey.*

Epaphroditus was **distressed** - not out of concern for himself - but **because they heard he was ill**. His heart is for his people.

✚ **A minister should be an example, setting the standard, raising the bar of Godliness, pray for your pastor. May he live sacrificially so you too will be spurred on to live a sacrificial life.**

So does your faith have the deeds to go with it? Do you engage with others to find out what other people's pressure points are, to find out how you can help.

■ **Hannah for example had Covid, did she need help with shopping?**

■ **Or visiting Joyce, that would really cheer her, helping Leo with the children or praying with him. Have something to share, cook something, use the gifts God has given you.**

✚ **Yes, every part of the body functioning and working together. Not like a lame man where one leg is dragging the other. A healthy church is like a healthy body.**

[The issue of self-sacrifice goes right to the core of my struggle as a sinner. Remember, the most powerful idol of all is the idol of self.](#)

Paul says **I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.** Rom 12:1

Epaphroditus lived up to his name. His name is a combination of Epi (on) and Aphrodite the ancient Greek goddess of sexual love and beauty, (identified with Venus by the Romans.)

(Epaphras the leader at Colossae is a contraction of the name)

Epaphroditus means like Aphrodite, **Epaphroditus** means "lovely"

May the Lord say to you as he undoubtedly said to **Epaphroditus** **‘Well done, good and faithful servant! Come and share your master's happiness!’** Matt 25:23 **END**