Philippians 2 v19-30 - Three Lessons

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[0:00] So if you've not been here before on Sunday evening, we have been working our way through the book of Philippians, which is the letter from the Apostle Paul and his friend Timothy to the church in Philippi.

And we have been learning that this letter is all essentially about self-sacrificial service, as in the giving of ourselves for the eternal well-being of others.
So it's not just like giving up some stuff so that someone might have a slightly better life now, but it is sacrificing ourselves that other people might know eternity with the Lord Jesus.
And obviously the great model of self-sacrificial service for the eternal well-being of others, as we were thinking about in Mark 8 and 9, is Jesus Christ. So chapter 2, verse 6, the Lord Jesus Christ, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.
Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.
[1:10] So this isn't that Jesus made himself less than God. Jesus did not give up his divinity. He was in very nature God. Rather, the fact is that he didn't use his divinity in a way to overcome his humanity, but lived in full humanity, giving himself to death on a cross.

Now, so that's where we've been up to. And we are now up to verse 19. And we're going to look at verses 19 to 30 from chapter 2. So let me read them to us as we begin.
Paul writes,
Now, one of the things about when you look at a passage like this in the Bible, you cannot say everything that needs to be said on the passage. Okay, that is impossible when you're preaching to say everything that could be said.
So instead, what I want to try and do this evening is point out three different themes from you in the Bible and in order from this passage and in order to kind of keep your interest and to keep it going.
[3:34] I want us to imagine that we're back in school and we're going to three different lessons. And we are looking at Philippians chapter 2, 19 to 30 in three different lessons.

And the first lesson, you know, the bell is gone. The first lesson that we're going to is geography. Now, of course, geography lessons are the high points of the school timetable.
Isn't that right, Liz? Liz was a geography teacher. I did geography at university. Geography is the high point of academic study. So this is the tough double geography, the high point.
Right. But we're going to look at this passage together. So what does a geography teacher want you to notice in Philippians chapter 2? What would they point out? Well, I think what they would say is that there's lots of movement in Philippians 2, verses 19 to 30, movement between Philippi and Rome, which is where Paul is in prison.
So there's movement, both movement that has happened and movement that is planned for the future. So what I want you to do, either on your own or with the person next to you, if you want to cheat by asking them, is just to work through the passage and draw on your handout all the movement that you can see between Philippi and Rome.
[4:49] OK, let me give you one just as a clue. OK, Epaphroditus has been sent from Philippi to Rome. Yeah, he has been sent as a messenger.

So you'll notice that he has been sent by them to Paul in order to give them a gift. And he almost died by doing it.
Yeah, you notice that. Now, there's lots of other movement in the passage. So on your own or with the person next to you, you can talk about it. See whether you can draw all the movements to and

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from Philippi.
Hopefully that's not too tricky. Go for it for a minute or two. OK, so sorry to interrupt you.
I know you're probably not finished. But don't worry. The point of that exercise is just to try and get you to look at the passage and start working out what's going on. So let me let me work through the movements chronologically rather than the order in which they appear in the passage.
[5:53] Let me go through them chronologically as in the order in which they actually happened. So the first one is Epaphroditus has gone from Philippi to Paul in Rome. So the church in Philippi sent Epaphroditus with a financial gift to help Paul who is in prison in Rome.

So the end of verse 25 tells you that they sent him to Paul to take care of his needs. The financial gift is mentioned in chapter four. The next movement planned is the return of Epaphroditus from Paul back to Philippi, presumably with this letter that Paul has written.
So he's going to take it back to them. So Epaphroditus had a rough time of it and Paul is hoping to send him back. In addition, then, the next movement is that Paul wants, after he's seen a bit more about what's going to happen to him, he hopes to send Timothy to Philippi as well.
So here's the next movement going from Paul back to Philippi is Timothy. This is going to be soon, according to verse 19, but Paul still has some concerns for his own well-being, which means that Timothy needs to stay with him for a little bit longer.
Then the next movement, which you might have missed, but I think is there, is that Timothy is going to return from Philippi to Rome to see Paul or wherever Paul happens to be, to bring him news of the Philippian church.
[7:19] So Timothy goes from Paul to the church in Philippi to find out how they're doing and comes back to Paul to report back with news, presumably telling him how they responded to the letter that he sent with Epaphroditus.

The final movement is there in verse 24, which is Paul is planning to go himself. Yeah, he is planning to go himself to see the Philippian church and he is confident in verse 22.
And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon. And I think that's five trips between Paul and Philippi, although Paul can't have a trip between himself and Philippi because technically he's there himself, isn't he, when he's there?
Anyway, never mind. But what do we learn? What's the point of all this? You know, what is the point of this geography lesson and all of these different trips forwards and backwards? Now, we're going to say more about this, but I hope at the very least you can see that all of this traveling backwards and forwards shows you that Paul's assumption is that relationships are a really important part of the Christian life.
Relationships not just in the church, but relationships between churches, their missionaries and pastors. Church in Paul's imagination here, the church in Philippi and him is a gathering, not an event.
[8:42] Right. So it is the gathering of a group of people, not an event that is put on. If church is a gathering of people, then there is no substitute for being there.

Right. It's fascinating, isn't it? Think about this. Right. Paul is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Paul is writing a section of scripture which is being transported from him to the church in Philippi.
Right. It's a portion of scripture which, according to 2 Timothy 3, 16, is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness that the man or woman of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
So Paul is sending like the best written letter that you could ever write. This is the highest point, really, of letter writing. Because this is under the inspiration of the Spirit. It is able to train and equip people for the Christian life.
But even though he's done that, still he wants to go. It's no substitute for being there. You can't gather by letter. And so at great cost and a huge sacrifice and a time where movement is easier than it has been, but certainly not as easy as it is today.
[9:50] Paul sends people and receives people and goes himself. I don't know whether you've thought about this about church, but it is worth just being clear, isn't it, that there is no substitute for turning up.

Paul's assumption, with all of this traveling backwards and forwards, is that there is no substitute for turning up. You can't say, you can't say, I went to church online.

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Okay, because any more than Paul could say, I went to church by letter. Because there's no substitute for gathering.
You know, our live stream is great, isn't it? It gives an opportunity for people who are unable to attend to get something which is better than nothing. But it isn't a substitute for the real thing.
And that's not because we've not invested enough in it, but because Philippians 2, 19 to 30, there is no substitute for turning up. So the geography bell has now gone.
[10:51] We're going to move down the corridor to the next lesson. We've learned about all the comings and goings, but the next lesson is psychology. Okay, so you go to psychology. I've never studied psychology, so I don't actually know what happens in a psychology lesson.

My suspicion is very little. I know some people here have studied psychology. That's perhaps the truth. But okay, in psychology, the teacher gets out Philippians 2 again.
She's not so much interested in the geography of the passage. You know, that kind of detail of investigation is beyond the psychology department. Instead, they want you to notice the emotions of the passage.
They want you to think about how people are feeling. So just for a moment, on your own or with the person next to you, just jot down all the emotions that you can notice in Philippians 2. You might, instead of wanting to jot them down, you might just want to look at the front and just scribble on them or circle them.
All the emotions that are felt in Philippians 2, 19 to 30. Have you had a chance to finish? Anyone want to shout out some of the emotions that they've seen in Philippians 2?
[11:57] Cheered. Cheered. Yes. Genuine concern. Yeah. Dedicated service.

So dedicated service. Yeah. So are you talking about Timothy's dedicated service? Yeah. Or Epaphroditus's? Three. Distress.
Yeah. We see some distress. Anxiety. Confidence. Honor. Yeah. Yeah. Sorrow upon sorrow. Yeah. We're all going at the same time. Joy. Yeah. Okay, let me just work through some of these with you. So I think firstly you see that Paul is wanting to be cheered by news of the Philippians in verse 19.
This is what he hopes will happen when Timothy returns to him with news of how the Philippians are doing. So he hopes that the Philippians will receive his letter, that they will rejoice in it, and then news will come back to Paul from Philippi and he will be cheered by it.
[13:01] But Paul's emotions are to some extent tied up, aren't they, with the Philippian church and how the Philippian church is doing. In verse 27, Paul tells the Philippians that he wants to be spared, or that he was spared, sorry, sorrow on sorrow, when Epaphroditus didn't die, which is what he obviously thought might happen.

It's fascinating, isn't it? Paul has written in the letter of Philippians, for me to live is Christ, to die is gain, but that doesn't mean he's blasé about the death of a friend or a fellow worker. Paul would have been heartbroken had Epaphroditus died.
Next, in verse 28, Paul is sure that the Philippian church will be made glad by Epaphroditus' return to them, and Paul himself will be less anxious knowing that Epaphroditus is safely home and being a blessing to the church in Philippi that cares so much about him.
Which probably explains the only instruction in the passage, which is in verse 29, for the Philippians to welcome Epaphroditus' home with great joy in the Lord and to honour him.
Now, there's no shortage here, is there, of material on feelings. But what is the point? If geography shows you the point is turning up, right, psychology tells you the value of caring, being concerned.
[14:18] You see, the challenge of the Christian life is not so much to suppress our emotions or to deny our emotions.

I think growing up, I went to a church when I was growing up that was, I need to be careful what I say, because they were lovely people and they loved the Lord. But there was a sense in which you sort of hung your emotions up with the coat at the door of church and then you walked in and pretended that you were absolutely unmoved by anything that you heard, sang or prayed.
That was what it felt like to me, being a Christian, was it was all very doer, you know. So we sang songs to the same sort of tune and we pretended that we weren't really emotional people.
Now, that is not Paul's version of the Christian life, is it? We are emotional people and we bring those emotions with us. The challenge of the Christian life is to feel the right thing in the right way in response to the right thing.

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Our problem emotionally is that we feel the wrong way in response to the wrong things or any other combination of that, feeling the right feeling at the wrong time, whatever it might be.
[15:26] And Paul shows us here how to navigate it. Paul shows that the appropriate use of emotions in the Christian life is some senses tied up in the perseverance and well-being of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

In other words, the key to being an emotionally healthy church is to care mostly about people and especially the spiritual well-being of people.
So it would be wrong to care more about the way things are done than the people who are doing them. Do you understand that?
The point is in the church is that we care mostly about the people in the church and how they are doing spiritually than we do the way things are being done. That doesn't mean that the way things are done doesn't matter.
But actually to care little for the wandering believer or to care little about a person who has gone cold on the Christian life is actually wrong. We should grieve.
[16:23] We should care when we hear news of people falling away. In our highly individualistic culture, we're taught, aren't we, not to get this kind of involved at this level in community or with one another.

But here, get this for the big shock of the evening that Paul is not a 21st century Londoner and he would gain your eye on the tube if he was there with you.
He would talk to you and he would ask you how you were doing because he was not a kind of isolated Londoner. He would be genuinely sad when things go badly for you.
He would be concerned for how you're doing spiritually. Why is Paul's emotional state tied up with the perseverance of the Philippian church? Is it because he is unhealthy? No, it's because he's Christ-like.
Jesus Christ is the one who wept over Jerusalem. He's the one who wept at the grave of a friend. He's the one who was angry at the superficial spiritual cover-ups of the Pharisees and the harsh burdens they placed on others.
[17:20] He was full of compassion for the weak and the broken, the lost and the hurting, the repentant and the needy. And the point of this psychology lesson is so should you and I.

We should care deeply. Geography, turn up. Psychology, care deeply. The bell's gone, right? Final lesson of the day, economics.
Economics. Anyone ever studied economics? Anyone ever been to an economics class? Wow, okay. Jen has been to an economics class. I have never studied it, or I did economic geography, but anyway, I don't really know very much about economics.
And that's going to come through in this final lesson. But as you arrive in the class, you take your seat. The teacher is not interested in Wednesday's coming up budget, but they're interested in Philippians 2.
And what they want you to do is look through Philippians chapter 2 and make a profit-loss calculation for what's going on. What in Philippians 2 is highly valued and what is considered loss?
[18:24] Now, we're not going to do this in groups because we don't quite have time. But what I want to show you is that there are two different perspectives, if you like. There are two different kinds of economics going on in the passage.

Version 1 of the economics is the profit-loss statements of Paul's missionary team. Do you notice that? In verse 21, Paul's mission team consider profit to be their own interest and loss to be the interest of Christ.
Okay. What matters most? What is a profit? My own interest. What is a loss? The interest of Christ. Therefore, I will not see the interest of Christ against my own personal needs.
So I'm happy to serve, but as long as it doesn't cost me my own personal needs. That's economics version 1. They're essentially self-interested, aren't they, even in their pursuit of Christian ministry.
I think those verses are meant to be a shock to you. It's there in black and white, but it's incredible, isn't it, that there are people on Paul's core missionary team, converted believers who live by this version of Christianity, this economic model of Christianity, which says that they will make no personal cost because they look out for their own interest and not those of Christ Jesus.
[19:43] Verse 21. The second economic model, though, is the profit-loss calculations that Timothy and Epaphroditus make. So Timothy, we're told, stands out in Paul's team because, verse

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20, he is concerned for the welfare of the Philippian church, genuinely concerned, above himself.

He swaps it around, yes, so he puts himself in the loss column and the welfare of the Philippian church in the gain column. I am in profit, says Timothy, when the Philippian church are doing well, even when I am at personal loss.
Self-interest is a loss. Welfare of the Philippians is a profit. Epaphroditus was working from the same model. He made the same calculation with regard to Paul's receipt of the Philippians' gift. Epaphroditus, and this is mind-blowing, isn't it, he so puts himself in the loss column, he says, it doesn't matter if I die as long as Paul is encouraged.
Incredible, isn't it? Now, there's a big clue here that Timothy and Epaphroditus are right and everyone else is wrong, which is in verse 21, which we've looked at, isn't it? For everyone looks out for their own interests and not those of Jesus Christ.
[20:54] It's amazing here, isn't it, that Paul says that the welfare of the Philippian church is the interest of Jesus Christ. Paul is saying here that Timothy and Epaphroditus have the right economic model because it's the same model as the model that Jesus Christ uses.

It's the same, looking out for others is the same as putting the interests of Christ ahead of your own interests. In other words, this is the pinch of it.
Self-concern is not Christ's concern. Self-concern is not Christ's concern, not because Christ is not concerned with you, but rather because Christ's concern for you is that you and every other Christian is more interested in others than you are in yourself.
That is, Christ's concern for you is that you and me are more interested in others than we are in ourselves. Now, I want to suggest that fits in with the whole message of the letter, doesn't it?
Jesus Christ is the great example of this self-sacrificial service for the eternal well-being of others, which we said at the beginning is what Philippians is all about. He left the glories of heaven at great cost to himself, sacrificing his life on the cross for the eternal well-being of others that we might be saved.
[22:11] And his desire is that we too live like that, putting our own desires in the loss column and the spiritual welfare of others in the profit column. Now, Anthony, don't worry, we'll be finished in a minute.

If you just... That's it. Thank you. Right. There's always some smart kid in the class, right? He puts their hand up just before the lesson finishes, which is really annoying.
And they say, listen, this economic model is all very well, Mr. Economics Teacher, but if we live like this, we're going to be bankrupt. I cannot put my self-interest in the loss column and other people's welfare in the profit column without going bankrupt, right?
If I keep spending myself for others, what will stop me from going bankrupt? What will stop me losing all money and all credit and just crashing and burning?
Well, this is what stops bankruptcy in that economic model. It is this, that Jesus, at great cost to himself, has poured into our account the blessings of his righteousness and salvation.
[23:18] There is, in this economic model, a stream of mercy and grace that becomes a flood, overwhelming our ability of our account to contain it. It overspills from us to others.

So holding back is pointless and, in a weird way, prevents you from enjoying more of what Christ has. We pour out grace and mercy and kindness and concern into the lives of others out of this overflowing, never-ending spring of generosity, which is ours in Christ Jesus, knowing that any sacrifice that we make for the sake of others can never match what has been given to us in the Lord Jesus Christ.
You can never drain the account. That's the point, isn't it? So here is Christian economics, if you like. So it puts my self-interest in the loss column, the welfare of others in the profit column, but it is poured into by the overwhelming generosity of the Lord Jesus Christ.
So I can continue to consider myself loss compared to your welfare because Christ is pouring himself into me and through me and through others into you.
A good friend of mine and her husband went to Turkey in the early noughties in order to do student ministry.
[24:38] The two of us had worked together with Christian students in the UK and at the end of our kind of time on staff together, we all sort of split up in different directions. I went to train for Christian ministry in a church in South London.

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They went off to Turkey. And at the time, there was quite a lot of trouble in Turkey and they came very close to a very difficult situation in which their lives were in grave danger.
And I was speaking to a friend at church about it and I was describing what was going on and the danger that they were in. And this friend said to me, Christian friend, he said, is it really worth it? Can we really as Christians ask people to make that kind of sacrifice for the sake of the gospel? Is it really worth it? And Paul would say, it's always worth it.
It's always worth it because Christ is pouring into us an abundance of self-giving love. And the more we pass it on, even at great cost to ourselves, even at the cost of our lives, the more we enjoy it.
[25:49] Because Christ has given himself for us so we can give ourselves to others in self-giving love. That's Christian economics. Geography, turn up. Psychology, care.

Economics, sacrifice. There you go. The three lessons of Philippians chapter 2. Let me pray. And then we'll sing to close. Heavenly Father, we want to pray that you would help us to learn the lesson of the value of turning up.
Lord, we want to recognize the great blessing it is, even this evening, to be here in one another's presence. And we thank you for each person here. We want to pray that you would help us to learn the value of caring.
That you would help us to learn what it is to be tied up with one another's well-being so that we are cheered by good news of spiritual growth, that we are concerned and anxious to see people persevere with the Lord Jesus.
And we pray, please, too, that you would teach us this lesson of Christian economics, that to sacrifice is to gain Christ. We pray, please, Lord, that we might continue to live lives of self-sacrificial service for the eternal well-being of others, for your glory.
[27:01] Amen. Amen. Amen.

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