

Place: Lurgan Baptist 8:2:2015

THE JOURNEY TO JOY

Reading: Philippians 2:25-30

10. MEET MR. CHARMING

John Beekman, a graduate of Moody Bible Institute, was given a death sentence by his doctor. He had a serious heart condition, and it was unlikely that he would live. He had one chance, a very slim one. They could insert a little plastic valve in his heart. At that time only two other people had survived the operation. He might, if he was careful, become “*survivor number three.*” Moody Institute of Science made a film of John Beekman's story which was called just that “**Survivor Number Three.**” Once the plastic valve was inserted, John Beekman counted his days and applied his heart unto wisdom. Instead of slowing life down to a careful pace and hoarding his days like a miser, he threw himself into pioneer missionary work amongst the Chol Indians in the tropical jungles of southern Mexico. His story became one of determination and courage, of a life spent prodigally, with one eye fixed firmly on the zero hour announced by his doctor and the other fixed on eternity.

He and his wife Elaine ignored all the doctors' warnings. They plunged through steaming jungles, they lived in primitive conditions, they reduced the Chol language to writing, they translated the Bible into that Indian tongue, they taught the Chols to read, led

them to Christ, and saw a new civilisation emerge where once there had only been savagery, paganism, and despair. My was Epaphroditus not just like that ? I mean here was Paul imprisoned in Rome (Acts 28:30) and when the Philippian church heard they were moved to action. They sent a gift to him by the hand of Epaphroditus (4:18) but Epaphroditus was not only the bearer of this gift, **he was in a real way the gift himself.** Paul says he is “*your messenger and he that ministered to my wants.*” (2:25) In other words, Epaphroditus was to stay in Rome and be Paul's personal servant and attendant. Now anyone who proposed to offer himself as the personal attendant of a man awaiting trial on a capital charge was laying himself open to the risk of becoming involved in the same charge. In truth, Epaphroditus risked his life to serve Paul.

Do you see what Paul says of him in (2:30) “*Not regarding his life,*” (*parabouleuomai*) The term means “*to hazard one's life, to gamble.*” Handley Moule translates that like this “*On account of Christ's work he was at death's very door, playing as it were the gambler with his life.*” You see, while ministering to Paul Epaphroditus took seriously ill, he was at death's door, but the heaviest part of his burden was not his own sickness, but that the church back home were worrying about him. But God had mercy on him, and after a period of convalescence Paul sends him back to the church at Philippi with this letter in his hand, telling the saints to receive him warmly. Now apart from this little snippet of Epaphroditus given by Paul we know nothing about him.

David Jeremiah says,

Apart from these verses he would be an unknown, but in many respects that fits him anyway. He was just a layman in the church at Philippi who held no office, wrote no books, gave no sermons, led no great enterprises for God. He was a messenger boy for the gospel, a servant of His Lord. No task was too menial for him to do, no assignment for was too little for him to accept, no risk was too great for him to take. He would have been as comfortable with a towel and basin.

Yet this charming Christian for that's what Epaphroditus means was held in the highest esteem by the apostle Paul. Why ?

(1) HIS PERSONAL CHARACTER

He was a **Balanced Christian**. Some years ago a famous preacher was driving along one of the state highways in USA when he noticed a freight carrying truck going along at an alarming pace. On the back of it were written these words, “ *At your service: any load: any time: any distance: anywhere.*” Epaphroditus was just like that for Paul refers to him “ *as your messenger and he that ministered to my wants.*” (2:25) Here was a man who placed his gifts at the disposal of the local church, ready to do whatever they wanted. What a tremendous encouragement he was to Paul in prison, indeed Paul describes him here as,

(a) A SON IN GOD'S FAMILY:

“ *My brother,*” (2:25) The word for “ *brother,*” means “ *being from the same source, to have a common origin.*” Paul was a Jew, Timothy was part Jew and part Gentile (Acts 16:1) and Epaphroditus was a full Gentile as far as we know. But though coming from different backgrounds, with different cultures, they belong to the same spiritual family, blood-related by the sacrifice of Calvary. One of the glorious things that happens when a person is saved is that they become the sons of God and become brothers and sisters to all who are saved ! My are you a member of God's family ? You say, “ *how can I know?*” Well, have you received Christ ? John says, “ *For as many as received Him, to them give He power to become the sons of God.*” (Jn 1:12) When Jimmy Carter was President of the U.S.A. he urged in a hand-written memo that top White House staff personnel spend “ *and adequate amount of time,*” with their families to assure a stable family life. Do you enjoy being around God's family ? Do you love the family of God ? (1 Jn 3:14) (a)

(b) A SERVANT IN GOD'S FIELD:

“ *And companion in labour,*” (2:25) Not only a fellow-believer, but a fellow-labourer. He was a member of God's family, but he was working to make others members of that family. I imagine that the kind of work Epaphroditus liked to do was that which had no publicity attached to it. When Dr. Alan Redpath was visiting Richmond Royal Horse Show, he tells us that

he remembered watching some of the high prancing horses going around the ring lifting up their heels and looking so smart. But he happened to walk around the back of the tent and he saw a grey plough horse pulling a great load of fodder for those horses that were riding around the ring and he thought its one thing to run around the ring in public, but its another thing to give them food behind the scenes. My is this not the kind of man Epaphroditus was ? He hated the glare of publicity. He was a “ *messenger,*” one sent with a love gift from the church at Philippi to Paul. *Unnoticed ! Unrewarded !* Perhaps even *Unthanked* yet getting on with the job. Is this you ? No task too small, no ministry too insignificant, no job too menial but you’re ready to do it ! (a) (b)

(c) A SOLDIER IN GOD'S FIGHT:

Not only a fellow-believer, and a fellow-worker, but a fellow-soldier. Now do you see how balanced Epaphroditus he was ? You see, these three descriptions parallel what Paul wrote about the gospel in the first chapter of this letter.

“ *My brother,*” that is the *Fellowship of the Gospel:*

“ *My companion,*” the *Furtherance of the Gospel:*

“ *My fellow-soldier,*” the *Faith of the Gospel:*

Epaphroditus was a balanced Christian. Now balance is important in the Christian life. Some people emphasise “ *fellowship,*” so much that they forget the furtherance of the gospel. Others are so involved in defending the “ *faith of the gospel,*” that they neglect

building fellowship with other believers. But Epaphroditus did not fall into either of these traps. He was like Nehemiah, the man who rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem with his sword in one hand and his trowel in the other. (Neh 4:17) My you cannot build with a sword or battle with a trowel. It takes both to get the Lord's work accomplished. Dr. Harry Ironside used to tell about a group of believers who thought only of “ *fellowship.*” They had little concern for reaching the lost or for defending the faith against its enemies ! In front of their meeting they held a sign, “ **JESUS ONLY,**” but the wind blew away some of the letters, and the sign read “ **US ONLY,**” a perfect description of a group of people who were not balanced Christians. What about you ? Is your character balanced ? (1)

(2) HIS TOTAL CONSECRATION

He was a **Burdened Christian.** Look if you will at (2:30) Here was a man who gave no thought to sparing himself even though his service placed him in peril of death. To be known as Paul’s servant spelled danger, but Epaphroditus shrugged his shoulders. Even when he realised he was very ill he persisted in his service. You see, this charming believer was,

(a) DEVOTED TO THE WORK OF CHRIST:

Do you see how Paul describes him ? “ *Your messenger,*” “ *he that ministered to my wants,*” “ *not regarding his life,*” that meant to risk everything for a cause, this dear man of God belonged to that group described in (Acts 15:26) “ *men that have hazarded*

their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The phrase “ *not regarding his life,*” is a translation of a Greek word (*paraboleumai*) and this is the only time it is used in the New Testament. In the language of the common people it meant “ *to gamble or bet.*” In other words, Epaphroditus gambled his very life to fulfil the work he had been given to do. The early Christians called those who risked their lives for Christ

“ *Parabolani,*” or “ *the Riskers.*” You see, in the early church there were societies of men and women who called themselves the *parabolani*. That is the riskers or gamblers. They would be those who would minister to the sick and to those in prison, and those with dangerous communicable diseases, whom no-one would help or go near with a bargepole. Aquila and Priscilla would have been members of that group. Paul wrote of them in Romans, “ *Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus, who have for my life laid down their own neck.*” That is they risked their own necks for Paul. (Rom 16:3-4 Rev 12:11)

In the city of Carthage in 252 A.D. there was a great pestilence or plague and many died. Cyprian the Bishop of Carthage took care of the sick and dying. He also asked his congregation to nurse the ill and bury the dead. You see, the pagans were throwing the corpses out of the city and running away in terror but the believers were ministering to those in need. Now Epaphroditus was a forerunner of the *parabolani*. Think of it. Epaphroditus had travelled from Philippi to Rome a distance of 800 miles, a journey that would have taken six weeks. While in Rome he was Paul’s personal servant and attendant. Do you recall, that the

runaway thief, the slave Onesimus, was found in the slums of Rome ? He was brought to Paul in his prison, where he was converted. (Phil 10) I just wonder who discovered him and fetched him ? Was this the kind of thing that Epaphroditus was doing ? Was it there in the filthy surroundings of the back streets and hiding places of imperial Rome that he caught his germ ? Whatever because of his devotion to the work of Christ he and death were next door neighbours. (a)

“ *God I pray thee light these idle stick of my life, and may I burn for thee, consume my life for it is Thine, I seek not a long life but a full one like you, Lord Jesus.*” These words were written by Jim Elliott in 1948. On Friday 5th January 1956 the thrill of Jim Elliott’s life was given for he took an Auca Indian by the hand, the tribe of people that he had longed to reach. At last the twain met 5 American missionaries and 3 naked savages. Two days later on Sunday January 8th 1956 the men for whom Jim Elliott prayed for six years killed him and his four companions. “ *I seek not a long life but a full one like you, Lord Jesus.*” My does this not bring a stinging rebuke to our easy going Christianity which makes no demands and calls for no sacrifice ? (a)

(b) DEVOTED TO THE WELFARE OF CHRISTIANS:

Do you see that word “ *ministered* ?” It’s an interesting word for it refers to Temple or Priestly service. (Exod 29:30 Num 16:9 Heb 10:11) As if the things this man did for the apostle Paul were of a

spiritual nature, because done also for the Lord. Do you recall the words of the Lord Jesus ? “ *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*” (Matt 25:40) My this man Epaphroditus was,

1. DEVOTED TO THE SERVANT OF GOD:

What a tragedy it would be to go through life and not be a blessing to anyone. Epaphroditus was a blessing to Paul. He stood with Paul in his prison experience and ministered to his needs. What times he and Paul must have had together. How I thank God for those have stood by me, and been a blessing to me. Are you devoted to helping the servants of God ?

2. DEVOTED TO THE SAINTS OF GOD:

You see, after being in Rome for some time Epaphroditus became seriously ill. He “ *was sick nigh unto death.*” (2:27) He was sick. You mean a Christian gets sick. Epaphroditus did. You say, “ *He was out of the will of God.*” Who said ? “ *Well he didn't have enough faith.*” Oh, really ? “ *Well it's a sign that there's sin in his life.*” Where does it say that ? You know, there's a teaching going around now that Christians ought never to get sick and if you do it's a sign you're out of the will of God, you haven't got enough faith, you haven't claimed your healing and all that kind of stuff. I want to tell you that you will have a hard time proving that from the Bible and in the experience of great Christians. Epaphroditus got sick

and the indication is he got sick because of the work of Jesus Christ and his involvement in it. The phrase “ *God had mercy on him,*” is very interesting because it implies that though the health of Epaphroditus was deteriorating, Paul was no longer performing miracles of healing to authenticate his apostleship. Here was Epaphroditus and he was at death's door. A man got in a prayer meeting and said, “ *My mother in law is at death's door. I want you to pray that God will pull her through.*” My we don't know what his sickness was, but the church back at Philippi became concerned about him, but this servant of Christ was not burdened about himself, he was burdened over the people at Philippi, because they were worried about him. He was worried about them worrying about him. (2) Most people get upset when you don't visit them. People like Epaphroditus get upset when you do visit them, for they don't want to be a burden to anyone.

A member of a church with 400 in attendance was asked by a friend, “ *how many ministers does your church have ?*” The friend replied, “ *Four hundred, but only two get paid.*” My are you ministering to others ? Are you bearing one another's burdens ? (Gal 6:2) Most folk are familiar with the name of Robert Louis Stevenson. He was the author of Treasure Island. In 1888, he went with his family to Samoa in the South Pacific and lived there until he died. When he died 60 Samoans carried his body to the top of the mountain where he lies buried today. Stevenson had involved himself in the lives of the Samoan people. He took great interest in them, indeed when several of the tribal people were imprisoned over a political

matter he did not forget them. He visited them in prison, bringing them gifts and was a constant source of encouragement to them. When they were freed, they were determined to show their appreciation. When it was suggested that they could cut a road through the dense bush to Stevenson's house, they immediately went to work. Finally, after much labour and sacrifice the road to Stevenson's house was completed. The natives called it, "***The Road of the Loving Heart.***" My ... should our lives not be like that ? An old sailor once gave this advice, "*Don't tell your troubles to others. Most of them don't care a hang and the rest are mighty glad of it.*" My do you care a "***hang*** ?" Like Epaphroditus is your life a blessing to others ?

(1) (2)

(3) HIS LOCAL CHURCH

He was a **Blessed Christian**. You see, in all probability Epaphroditus was the bearer of this very letter and when he reached Philippi, this letter would be read to the church there, and the Philippian believers would then realise that they had a responsibility towards this servant of God. What was it ? Well, they were,

(a) ***TO RECEIVE HIM WARMLY:***

Do you see what (2:29) says ? "*Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness.*" Now why does Paul stress this ? Well, this church had sent Epaphroditus to Paul with their love gift (4:18) but not only that, they had sent him to Paul that he might minister to Paul. Now that he was coming home earlier

than expected, there might those who would think that he was "*a quitter, a coward, and " a deserter,*" so Paul says receive him warmly. Some may have questioned him being the best choice in the first place. Sometimes there are believers who leave our churches to work in other lands and before long they're back home again. Could it be that they were mistaken in their guidance ? Could it be that they were never called in the first place ? There are others who leave us, to work for God in other places and after a period of time they come home, and sometimes instead of receiving them, we reject them, we let them know that they are "***quitters,***" we who have never even gone to our next door neighbour to tell them about Christ. Paul says (a)

(b) ***RESPECT HIM GREATLY:***

" *Hold such in reputation because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death.*" (2:29) The word "*reputation,*" means to honour one, value highly, to praise, to deem precious. (1 Pet 2:4) Epaphroditus was precious and Paul was telling the saints to respect him greatly. ***Christ gets the glory but there is nothing wrong with the servant receiving the honour.*** Paul was a firm believer in honouring people that deserved to be honoured. Do you recall what he says to the church at Thessalonica ? "*And we beseech you brethren to know them which labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you. And to esteem them very highly in love for their works sake and be at peace among yourselves.*" (1 Thes 12-13) Can I give you a wee piece of advice. Don't you ever put forward your hand against the Lord's anointed, for

God may deal with you in judgement, (1 Sam 24:6)
Respect the servants of God greatly.

Epaphroditus: A Charming Christian. A man who was a blessing to Paul, to his own church, to us today. A man who thought of others and not of self. The story is told of two friends in World War 1, who were inseparable. They had enlisted together, trained together, were shipped overseas together, and fought side by side in the trenches. During an attack one of the men was critically wounded in a field filled with barbed wire obstacles, and he was unable to crawl back to his foxhole. The entire area was under enemy crossfire and it was suicidal to try to reach him. Yet his friend decided to try. Before he could get out of his own trench his sergeant yanked him back inside and ordered him not to go. ***“It's too late. You can't do him any good, and you'll only get yourself killed.”***

A few minutes later, the officer turned his back, and instantly the man was gone after his friend. A few minutes later he staggered back, mortally wounded, with his friend, now dead in his arms. The sergeant was both angry and deeply moved. *“What a waste,”* he blurted out. *“He's dead, and you're dying. It just wasn't worth it.”* With almost his last breath, the dying man replied, ***“Oh, yes, it was Sarge. For when I got to him, the only thing he said was, I knew you would come, Jim.”*** He was there for his friend when it cost. ***Epaphroditus was there for Paul when it cost !*** Are you there for ***“others,”*** despite the cost ? Do you have the mind of Christ ?