



'The maturity of self-denial'

Phil.1.27-30 2.19-30

Background

Holy Week always affords a particular opportunity to reflect on the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, those pivotal days around which all history revolves, and the very centre of the gospel message.

How do those events impact our lives as believers? How *should* they impact our living? How *do* they impact our living? 'Holy Week' provides a chance to pause, reflect and perhaps press the 'reset' button in our lives.

These passages in Paul's letter to the church at Philippi are a helpful place to start in so doing. The exhortation in the first passage (1.27-30) to conduct ourselves 'in a manner worthy of (or, more literally, *'corresponding to'*) the gospel of Christ' underlines the corporate dimension of our lives as those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ: while the second (longer) passage (2.19-30) illustrates what such living will look like by reference to the example of two '(un)likely lads', Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Between the two passages, of course, there is the famous 'hymn' which sets out the striking 'contours' of Jesus' living, that 'mindset' which determined how He conducted Himself and which Paul, therefore, urges on his readers as the essence of gospel living. It's worth having a look at that familiar passage [2.5-11: see 'day' (1)] insofar as it really both defines what conduct 'worthy of the gospel of Christ' will be like, and explains what shaped the living of these two believers (Timothy and Epaphroditus) whom Paul describes in such warm terms.

The passages are an always timely reminder that it is through our *lives*, as much as our words, that we bear witness to Christ and the grace of His gospel – and not just our lives as individuals, but our life together as His people.

There are many challenging lessons for us to learn from the detail of these brief portraits of two rather 'ordinary' members of Christ's church: and not the least of those lessons is the degree to which the death and resurrection of Jesus had been incorporated into, and thoroughly transformed, their living. It was the repeated demonstration of just such Christ-centred and Christ-like lives which ensured, humanly speaking, that the message of the gospel gained such astonishing traction in the ancient world. May it do so again today!

Start with **'days' (1), (4), and (7)**.

1) Monday 25th March – gospel living

Read [Philippians 1.27-28](#)

“.. *striving together as one for the faith of the gospel* ..” (Phil.1.27)

Contending for the faith of the gospel has as much to do with our *living* as with our verbal testimony. How we conduct ourselves day by day is to be a demonstration of gospel truth. Here are 3 broad brush strokes: stand firm: strive hard: stick together.

Read the description of Jesus given in [2.6-11](#): how does all that is said of Jesus in those verses play out in the way we are called to live our lives?

Which areas of your living are most challenged by Paul’s call to ensure the way you conduct yourself gives expression to the gospel?

In what ways do you see the exhortation to ‘*strive together as one for the faith of the gospel*’ being demonstrated by your fellowship?

How can we as believers be helped to overcome the fears that arise on account of ‘those who oppose you’?

Prayer: *Make me an instrument of Your peace, O Lord, and give me grace each day to preach the gospel always, in how I speak and what I say, in who I am and what I do.*

2) Tuesday 26th March – gospel struggles

Read [Philippians 1.29-30](#)

“.. *it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ .. to suffer for Him* ..” (Phil.1.29)

There will invariably be opposition to the message of Christ (v.28) – the experience of Jesus Himself will become yours as His follower, for He who disarmed principalities and powers calls you to enter the field of battle with Him and proclaim His victory.

Is suffering of one sort or another going to be the experience of all who believe in Jesus?

Why did Paul view such suffering as inevitable?

Prayer: *Praise be to you, O Lord my God and Saviour, for You daily carry my burdens and sustain me through the trials which come my way, giving me Your victory.*

3) Wednesday 27th March – gospel concern

Read [Philippians 2.19-21](#)

“.. *who will show genuine concern for your welfare* ..” (Phil.2.20)

Because as a believer you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the pattern of Christ Jesus ([Phil.2.5-11](#)) will become the pattern of your life too. Timothy provides an example of just that in his selfless concern for the welfare of others: do you evidence the same?

‘Genuine concern’ for the welfare of others is wrought in believers’ hearts by the Holy Spirit: whose welfare is the Lord laying on your heart especially today?

To what extent have you seen this change in your own life, from being preoccupied with your own interests to looking out for those of Jesus Christ?

Prayer: *O for a heart to praise Thee, Lord, a heart from sin set free: a heart in every thought renewed and full of love divine, pure and good, a copy, Lord of Thine.*

4) Thursday 28th March – gospel generation

Read [Philippians 2.22-24](#)

“.. as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel ..” (Phil.2.22)

God makes things grow ([1 Cor.3.7](#)): it’s no surprise, therefore, that the ministry of Paul, this notable servant of God generated under God a line of faithful servants, whose lives and ministries replicated his. A shy youth becomes a mighty ambassador!

What are the benefits of the model of ‘apprenticeship’ which characterised Paul’s ministry and which is well illustrated in his dealings with Timothy?

The Leadership Team are seeking to develop a ‘training culture’ within the life of the fellowship: how might Paul’s pattern of ‘apprenticing’ the next generation of gospel workers be developed among us here?

To what extent and in what ways might older and more mature Christians be helped and encouraged to fulfil the role of a ‘mother’ and father’ in Christ?

Who have been good ‘mentors’ in your life as a believer?

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, for those who have taken me under their wing, to counsel, support and encourage me in the work of the gospel: may their labours not be in vain!*

5) Friday 29th March – gospel grace

Read [Philippians 2.25](#)

“.. whom you sent to take care of my needs ..” (Phil.2.25)

Good Friday. What’s said of Epaphroditus here is true at an altogether deeper level of the Lord Jesus Christ whom he served. The Son of God was “sent to take care of my needs.” Jesus, supremely, is your Brother, co-Worker, fellow Soldier and Messenger!

Consider carefully the ways in which Epaphroditus is described: in what ways do each of these descriptions find expression in your life?

Read [Phil.4.19](#): what have been the most striking examples of the Lord meeting all your needs?

Prayer: I can never thank You enough, my God, that You sent Your own beloved Son to take care of my needs at an infinite cost to Him. May my life reflect true gratitude.

6) Saturday 30th March – gospel affections

Read [Philippians 2.26-28](#)

“.. he longs for all of you ..” (Phil.2.26)

These verses are replete with the affections. Longing, distress, sorrow, eagerness, gladness, anxiety. A window, through His people, onto the heart of God Himself. He sees our misery, hears our groans, and is concerned ([Ex.3.7](#)). That’s why He came.

How is such mutual affection among believers best kindled and deepened?

In what sense (if any) can God be said to ‘feel our pain’?

Prayer: How deep Your Father’s love for me, how vast beyond all measure, that You should give Your only Son, to make this wretch Your treasure.

7) Sunday 31st March – gospel hope

Read [Philippians 2.29-30](#)

“.. honour people like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ ..” (Phil.2.29f)

Happy Easter! The faith of a man like Epaphroditus is matched by his costly, risking-his-life love, and by his surging, soaring hope in the resurrection life afforded to us in Christ. For believers, to live is indeed Christ: and to die is glorious gain ([Phil1.21](#))!

What difference does the fact of Jesus’ resurrection make on the way you live your life?

Has our concern not to occasion needless offence resulted in our being more cautious and less ready to take risks for the sake of the gospel?

How can we best be helped as believers to grow in the conviction that to die is indeed truly gain?

Who have provided examples for you of this sort of living, inspiring you to grow in your faith-fuelled service of Jesus?

Prayer: I will not boast in anything, no gifts, no power, no wisdom: but I will boast in You, my Lord, Your death and resurrection. Praise be to Your glorious Name!