

Veterans
Philippians 2:19-30
Philippians #4

For greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

"First to fight for the right, and to build the nation's might. And the Army goes rolling along." "Anchors aweigh, my boys, anchors aweigh. Farewell to foreign shores, we sail at break of day." "Off we go into the wild blue yonder, climbing high into the sun. "From the Halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli; we fight our country's battles in the air, land, and sea." "We sing on land or sea. Through surf and storm and howling gale, high shall our purpose be."

Yesterday, we sang those songs with great joy because we celebrated a great day: Veterans Day. It was a day where national honor went to those who deserve it: Our veterans. If you ask veterans about their service, they will tell you that serving in the military was not easy; but it was certainly worthy of their best effort and sacrifice. Soldiers fight a war against evil in the air, land, and seas. The soldier's objective is to stand between those who pose a threat and those he is sworn to protect. Today we see the story of two soldiers of the Gospel who fought a different type of battle. They stood against the evil that pervades the hearts of men. They were Timothy and Epaphroditus. Paul mentions them in Philippians 2:19-30. They had one objective: to stand between the evil that pervades and those they were called to serve.

You see friends, as believers and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, you and I are veterans on the same battlefield in the most common war known to mankind: the battle between righteousness and unrighteousness; between good and evil; between God and the devil; and between joyfulness and joylessness. And the same qualities that define a soldier who fights for our nation with joy in his heart are the same qualities that must define us as veterans on the battlefield in the most common war known to mankind. Without these qualities, we have no hope of victory. But with them victory is assured. *They are the qualities of being rare, being provable, being compassionate, and being honorable.* By God's great design on this great Veteran's Weekend, we see these qualities in Paul's discussion of Timothy and Epaphroditus in the passage that comes next in Philippians. It's Philippians 2:19-30

¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. ²⁰ I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. ²¹ For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. ²³ I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. ²⁴ And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon. ²⁵ But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. ²⁶ For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. ²⁹ So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, ³⁰ because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.

1. Being Rare (v20; v25)

- **Forgetting the Words of the Star-Spangled Banner:** (1) We used to consider forgetting the words of the Star-Spangled Banner while singing the National Anthem rare, something that doesn't happen that often. (2) Now it's becoming more common. (3) I watched a ballgame a week or two ago where the singer had to look in the palm of his hand to read the cheat sheet he made when he got to "O'er the ramparts we watched. Were so gallantly streaming." (4) Trying to make light of it, the announcer said, "that's the part I always forget to."
- **Paul Considered Timothy and Epaphroditus Rare for the Right Reasons:** (1) As biblically defined, the word "rare" denotes being unusually great and unusually excellent. (2) The reason both were unusually great and unusually excellent is because Paul speaks of them here in a way that's different from the rest of his letters. (3) About Timothy he says in v20 "there is no one else like him." Paul is right. There wasn't. He met Timothy, born to a Jewish mother and Greek father, on his first missionary journey in Lystra and converted him. Then, he joined Paul and Silas on his 2nd and 3rd missionary journeys. He's even got two letters written to him preserved for us in the NT, the only person in all of biblical literature who can make that claim. (4) About Epaphroditus, Paul says he's "my brother, co-worker, fellow soldier, and messenger" in v25. He's right there too. When the Philippians got word Paul was in prison in Rome, the church sent him a care package via Epaphroditus. And he, in turn, took the letter of Philippians back to the church. He did what sheep are supposed to do according to Jesus' Parable of the Sheep and Goats. He was faithful to display the rare quality of doing something for the "least of these." And God rewarded him by preserving for us his example.
- **So How Do We Be Rare in an Un-Rare World:** (1) Think about it this way. One biblical commentator writes this about this passage: "Philippians 2:19-30 is home to not one good memory verse. But it is home to the rarest of travel itineraries ever recorded." (2) That's what this passage is: a travel itinerary. (3) But there's a reason this travel itinerary occurs where it does: Timothy and Epaphroditus displayed rare Christlike qualities of joy in hardship and humility in service and sacrifice that Paul just mentioned in the previous passage. (4) That's what he looks for in us also.

- **App:** Many do ordinary things in a common way. But we are called to unordinary things in an uncommon way. The Veterans of our Armies did. Timothy and Epaphroditus did too. We must also.

2. Being Provable (v22; v27)

- **State Nicknames** — (1) I love state nicknames. I was born in the Palmetto state. My parents live in the Tar Heel State. I've lived in the Peach State, the Pelican State, and the Sunshine State. (2) I've been to many states. But there is one state I'd like to go to: Missouri, the Show Me State. (3) For in Missouri, proving yourself is extremely important.
- **Timothy and Epaphroditus Would have had No Problem Being from the Show-Me State:** (1) About Timothy, Paul says in v22: "But you know that Timothy has proved himself." Paul tells them here that what he knows about Timothy is also what the Philippians knew from Timothy's demonstration. Timothy ministered alongside Paul on his second missionary journey in Troas, Corinth, and Philippi. There was one who should have been with them but was not: John Mark (the Gospel writer). He abandoned Paul. But Timothy did not. He endured the same threats, the same harassments as Paul. In some cases, he got it worse because he was young. But he was faithful. Paul reminds the Philippians of that. (2) Epaphroditus proved himself in a different way. He didn't have to go to see Paul in prison. He was under no obligation. He went out from the church at Philippi and, according to v27, almost died for it. But he took care of Paul's needs (v25). And, most importantly, he became a minister in Paul's affliction to the point that Paul said when God spared Epaphroditus, he spared him from "sorrow upon sorrow." That's how important Epaphroditus was to Paul.
- **I Want to Be Used vs I Want to Demonstrate:** (1) So often, we have the greatest of intentions, don't we? "God, I want to be used." "Jesus, please use me." (2) Timothy and Epaphroditus asked a different question: "God, I want to demonstrate. How can I demonstrate?"
- **App:** You've got to have the want to and the desire. But you can't stop there. It always has to me to demonstration; to show-me; to the Missouri mentality.

3. Being Compassionate (v20; v26)

- **Wife's Shoes:** (1) My wife has a thousand pairs of shoes in her closet. (2) She has a pair of tennis shoes that seems like they have been around our house from the time Methuselah was a baby. (3) I think I know routes those shoes have taken all of these years. But I don't. But the one who wears them does. (4) And compassion is caring enough about the other person's journey to take those shoes out in order to walk them in it yourself, knowing full well the shoes might not fit. But you are willing to be uncomfortable for the sake of the journey.
- **Compassion Can't Be Faked. It Must be Genuine:** In v20, Paul tells us Timothy showed "genuine concern" for the welfare of the Philippians. It denotes being sincere for someone else's state of being. It's not just caring about their needs that Paul has commended Timothy to the Philippians. It's that he cares most for them spiritually. Philippi was home to the imperial cult. They worshipped Caesar. Timothy, however, cared enough for them to tell them Jesus loves them and is, alone, worthy to be worshipped.
- **Compassion Cares How Others Feel.** In v26, he says Epaphroditus was "distressed because he heard he was ill." Epaphroditus was nearly on his deathbed and his concern was how news of those would impact the Philippians, not himself. That's caring for the soul of others looks like.
- **Compassion Refreshes.** In v28, Paul says "I am all the more eager to send him so that you may be glad, and I have less anxiety." I tend to cause anxiety of those I'm around. They have less of it when I leave. Paul had anxiety because Epaphroditus couldn't be where he was needed, and he knew the Philippians would be "glad" (refreshed) when they saw him again.
- **App:** The words "glad" and "refresh" are synonymous with the taste of fresh water. That's the type of impact we can have on others if we'll let our deeds do the talking, just like Timothy and Epaphroditus.

4. Being Honorable (v29)

- **Quotes About Honor** - (1) Thomas Carlyle - "Show me the man you honor, and I will show you the man you are." (2) Jacques-Benigne Bossuet - "Honor is like the eye, which cannot suffer the least impurity without damage. It is a precious stone, the price of which is lessened by a single flaw. (3) Honor belongs to our Veterans. And it certainly belonged to Timothy and Epaphroditus.
- **The Philippians Were About to Get a Returning Visitor and an Esteemed Son's Return** — (1) About Timothy, Paul says "I hope to send Timothy as soon as I see how things go with me" in v23. (2) About Epaphroditus, Paul tells the Philippians "I am all the more eager to send him (home)" in v28.
- **And Paul's Message Was Clear on What to Do When they Got Back (v29):** (1) Welcome - gladly receive. (2) Honor — regard with great respect and the highest of esteem. For honorable people deserve honor.
- **Mary Roach** — "Heroism doesn't always happen in a burst of glory. Sometimes small triumphs and large hearts change the course of history." That was true of Timothy and Epaphroditus. And it will be true of us if we will honor the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives and go about it honorably. Praise be to God.