

Yateley Baptist Church, Sunday 7 June 2020

Opening Prayer

Hymn: Praise! 190

O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder
consider all the works thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
thy power throughout the universe displayed:

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
how great thou art! How great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
how great thou art! How great thou art!*

2 When through the woods and forest glades I
wander
and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze:

Russian, translated by Stuart K Hine (1899-1989)

3 And when I think that God—his Son not
sparing —
sent him to die, I scarce can take it in;
that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
he bled and died to take away my sin:

4 When Christ shall come with shout of
acclamation
and take me home—what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration
and there proclaim, my God, how great thou
art!

Reading: Philippians 2:19-30, ESV

¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰ For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. ²³ I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

²⁵ I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, ²⁶ for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. ²⁹ So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honour such men, ³⁰ for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

Hymn: Praise! 859

Jesus, master, whose I am,
purchased yours alone to be,
by your blood, O perfect Lamb,
shed so willingly for me:
let my heart be all your own,
let me live to you alone.

2 Jesus, Master, whom I serve,
though so feebly and so ill,
strengthen hand and heart and nerve
all your bidding to fulfil:
open now my eyes to see
all the work you have for me.

3 Jesus, Master, will you use
one who owes you more than all?
As you will! I would not choose;
only let me hear your call.
Jesus, let me always be
in your service, glad and free.

4 Jesus, Master, I am yours;
keep me faithful, keep me near,
shine on all my days and hours,
all my homeward way to cheer.
Jesus! at your feet I fall;
be my Lord, my all-in-all!

Frances R Havergal (1836-1879)

Prayer

Hymn: Praise! 860

Lord, speak to me, that I may speak
in living echoes of your tone;
as you have sought, so let me seek
your wandering children, lost, alone.

2 O lead me, Lord, that I may lead
the stumbling and the straying feet;
and feed me, Lord, that I may feed
your hungry ones with manna sweet.

3 O teach me, Lord, that I may teach
the precious truths that you impart;
and wing my words that they may reach
the hidden depths of many a heart.

Frances R Havergal (1836-1879)

4 O fill me with your fulness, Lord,
until my heart shall overflow
in kindling thought and glowing word
your love to tell, your praise to show.

5 O use me, Lord, use even me,
just as you will, and when, and where;
until at last your face I see,
your rest, your joy, your glory share.

Sermon: Philippians 2:19-30 – Lives Worthy of the Gospel

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come to see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.” (v27)

Corona Virus, Corona Virus, Corona Virus...

A shocking, unexpected obituary prepared

What would we want ours to say?

Ch 1:27: “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come to see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.”

Paul not only shows us what our greatest aspiration in life is to be, but also he shows us where it is that we get the power to do all the other things we aspire to do and be in this life.

Paul wants them to:

- Be in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.”
- Not to be “frightened in anything” (28),
- “Not only to believe in [Christ] but also suffer for his sake” (29).

Paul tells the Philippians what living worthy of the gospel looks like within the context of the local church:

- “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (3-4).
- “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (and reminds them what this means)
- “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (12-13).

Today we consider two men whose obituaries would most certainly have said that they lived lives that were “worthy of the gospel of Christ”.

1. Timothy: Selflessness

“I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by news of you” (19).

He was always prepared to bow to God’s will – neither being fatalistic, nor presumptuous.

It would also be a great sacrifice for Paul personally to send him, but he longs to hear how they are.

“For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” (20-21). As he looked around him, Paul could find no one else that he deemed to be worthy of the task.

Timothy was the only one who had a heart for the Philippians as Paul himself did.

Many in Rome preached Christ from rivalry and envy – full of selfish ambition, hoping to fill the apostle’s shoes in his absence. V15-17

However “most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.” V14

Paul is condemning the able-bodied men in the church who had no concern for the church in Philippi or about spreading the gospel.

Lesslie Newbigin: “I suddenly saw that someone could use all the language of evangelical Christianity, and yet the centre was fundamentally the self, my need of salvation. And God is auxiliary to that.... I also saw that quite a lot of evangelical Christianity can slip, can become centred in me and my need of salvation, and not in the glory of God.”

People can say and believe all the right things about the gospel, but their focus on themselves and their needs not on Christ.

“But you know Timothy’s proven worth” (22). Timothy had proved himself to be a man worthy of the gospel.

“As a son with a father he has served me with me in the gospel.” He was a spiritual son and apprentice to Paul.

Timothy’s example says to the Philippians – and to us – that by God’s grace, we too can live lives that are worthy of the gospel, if we take Paul’s charge to “Have this mind among [y]ourselves, which is [y]ours in Christ Jesus”.

2. Epaphroditus: Worthy of Honour

Epaphroditus travelled the risky 800 miles to Rome, so as to pay Paul’s prison expenses and to minister to his needs.

Unfortunately he fell ill on the journey, but made it to Paul with the gift and it is now time for him to return home.

Epaphroditus’ selfless conduct was a living example of the mind of Christ, as he puts others above himself – even if it means risking his life.

“My brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier” v25 - these two were related by their union with Christ.

“Fellow worker” - while Epaphroditus worked quietly behind the scenes, yet both were co-workers – one in work and dignity.

“Fellow soldier” - The two had fought, spiritually, shoulder to shoulder in Rome.

Epaphroditus was a layman whom we never would have heard of unless Paul chose to mention him here. He never served in any public capacity.

To serve Christ in an unnoticed capacity in the Body of Christ is as much the work of Christ as is public, up-front in church ministry.

“For he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill” (26).

He was distressed because he was worried that they were distressed. The word “distressed”, is also used to describe Jesus’ agony in Gethsemane. Epaphroditus agonised as he imagined his church family praying for him.

How selfless he was and how full of empathy!

Again, he was like his Saviour in his lack of self-interest and his thoughtful focus on others, as we should seek to be also.

“So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honour such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me” (29-30).

They owed this young man more than they could express.

Epaphroditus, in spite of his lack of obvious gifting, was a man like Christ.

Epaphroditus' near death for Paul echoes Christ's real death for us (2 v 8.) This was a man who had the mind of Christ.

Most people today believe that the people who deserve the most honour are the ones who seek prestige and position, as they did in Rome.

As Christians, we need to ensure that our honour goes to those who deserve it most, to those who are Christlike – not just to those who make the loudest noise.

All gifts given by God are to be used - if you bury your talent, God will certainly hold you accountable. This is what the master said to the lazy servant in Jesus' parable in Matthew 25:14-29.

R. Kent Hughes sums up what you should aspire your obituary to say: “Epaphroditus certainly wasn't Paul or Timothy. He was a brother, a fellow worker, a fellow soldier, a messenger, a minister (25) – that's all! He had the mind of Christ – that's all! He is honoured today by both God and man – that's all!”

As we seek to live lives worthy of the gospel, may we recognise that what matters most is not what gifts we have or haven't got, but the way in which we use whatever it is that God has graciously given us, in his service. Living a life that is worthy of Jesus isn't complicated, but neither is it easy in a world in which sin is so rife. However, we don't do it alone, as Paul reminds us – we are to “Have this mind among [y]ourselves, which is [y]ours in Christ Jesus...”

Hymn: Praise! 811

O for a closer walk with God,
a constant, heavenly calm;
a light to shine upon the road
that leads me to the Lamb!

2 Where is the blessing that I knew
when first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
of Jesus and his word?

3 What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
the world can never fill.

William Cowper (1731-1800)

4 The dearest idol I have known-
however much adored-
help me to tear it from your throne
and worship you as Lord.

5 So shall my walk be close with God,
my mind serene and calm;
so purer light shall mark the road
that leads me to the Lamb.

Closing Prayer