

BROOMFIELD



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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Counting the Cost

Biblical Ministry

A Broken Spirit

He wasn't an old man when tragedy struck; yet it wouldn't take long before he looked old. In the providence of the Lord, he lost his children, wealth, well-being, and health. Not surprisingly, as a servant of God he was washed up. No longer would he be seen in church. No longer would he pray for his family. No longer would he approach God as his loving Father. His wounds were just too deep. What once was an energetic, diligent servant of the Lord, was now a disheartened and discouraged man. In fact, at one point he said, "m spirit is broken, my days are extinguished, the grave is ready for me" (Job 17:1) NASB).

In other words, he was saying the fight is gone. Just let me die!

Such is the place that ministry can drive you if you are not careful. In fact, across the pages of redemptive history there are many shells of what used to be diligent servants of God. Who could forget Elijah? Mary and Martha? David? Habakkuk? Jonah? Timothy? Moses? John the Baptist? Abraham? The disciples in the upper room? All of these men and women were well acquainted with what the Puritans called, "A Dark Night of the Soul!"

What message is there for one suffering discouragement in ministry? What hope can be held out to the one who has been beaten up on account of God? Philippians 4 gives us the answer to these questions.

Paul has commended the Philippians for their ministry in his life and we now come to a passage which serves as the encouragement for all ministers of need.

Encouragement

Philippians 4:18, "But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God."

Up to the time that Paul penned this epistle, we know that the Philippians' ministry was not easy. They were converted in a pagan culture which was hostile to Christianity and any notion that there was one

God. Recall that Macedonia — which housed such cities as Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea — was the idol-capital of the world. With Mt. Olympus within its confine, this region was the champion of ancient Greek religion which venerated the ancient Greek gods of Zeus, Apollo, Artemis, Hermes, Dionysus, and Aphrodite. Furthermore, as part of the culture of their day Philippi would have been governed by the many trade guilds through which the artisans and craftsmen of a city made their living.

Now, recall that membership in a trade guild brought with it requisite homage and sacrifices to the god(s) of the guild. Thus to be saved in this culture meant for many the loss of their livelihood- for the child of God obviously wouldn't sacrifice to the god's of the guild. Hence they lost their membership and thus the ability to sell their product.

We also know that Philippi was a Gentile city because it lacked the ten Jewish males to form a synagogue. Consequently, the "community" for which Jewish culture was famous was non-existent in Philippi. And this meant coming to Christ in Philippi left a person bereft of the emerging Christian community which flourished throughout the ancient world. In fact, on account of the lack of community in Philippi, Paul had to exhort them accordingly in this epistle.¹

In light of all of this, we are not surprised to read that the trial, hardship, and difficulty that Paul faced as he penned this epistle had descended upon the Philippians. Paul wrote to the Philippians that he knew they were “Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me” (Philippians 1:30).

And yet, in spite of their difficult past and present, the Philippians also understood that part of being a child of God is taking responsibility for the body of Christ as a whole. They knew that when a famine hit the saints in Jerusalem, the Philippians were first in line when it came to giving.

2 Corinthians 8:3-4, “For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.”

When Paul was attacked on countless occasions and unable to "pay the bills" as he endeavored to preach Christ, the Philippians sent multiple offerings.

2 Corinthians 11:9, “And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied.”

And now, ten years after the founding of this church, Paul was at the end of himself in a Roman prison in a rather hostile environment, once again the Philippians rose to the occasion sending.. This time they not only sent money², but also Epaphroditus whose purpose was to bring the love of Christ to Paul.³

These Philippians were not such amazing ministers, but they were faithful ministers. The Philippians were not abnormal. Rather they are typical of the love and concern that should exist in the body of Christ.

The Cost of Serving

There is a cost associated with citizenship in the kingdom of God. Salvation not only brings with it the

¹ Compare Philippians 1:27

² Compare Philippians 4:18

³ Compare Philippians 2:25

promise of persecution and suffering⁴ but it also brings with it the obligation to pour out your life sacrificially for the body of Christ.. Remember the words of Paul.

Philippians 2:17, “Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.”

Such is the call of all God's people! In fact the mark of genuine, living, breathing, and abiding Christianity is not simply what you profess (your doctrine, and creedal statements).⁵ It also involves what you give in order to secure the growth of others in grace.

John 13:35, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” How will the world know that Christianity is not just another religion? They will know by our love, care, and devotion to and for one another.

James 1:27, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

What is it that constitutes genuine Christianity? It is not theologically crossed "T"s and dotted "I"s — this goes without saying. BUT, "Are the poor, widowed, and orphaned cared for?"

Hebrews 10:25, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

As you know, this is the classic text for exhorting church attendance. Yet don't miss it, one can attend a church for years — never missing an event — but if you don't encourage the body in Christ, you are guilty of forsaking that body!

It is in this context that it is no surprise to read that one of the chief symptoms of apostasy throughout God's word is the failure to take care of the needy.⁶ And so there is a cost — a great cost — to citizenship in the kingdom of God: It is caring for the body of Christ!

If you take this calling seriously, I promise you that you will be left exhausted, worn-out, lacking, hurting, humbled, and bereaved. At time you will feel neglected, overlooked, saddened, and overwhelmed. That is the cost of ministry — caring for the soul of another!

2 Corinthians 11:28-29, “Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?”

What's the consolation? What's the encouragement? What comfort is there for the one who has poured himself out for the Lord? Paul answers that question as he describes — by the inspiration of the Spirit of God — the work of ministry from the perspective of God.

The Consolation: Fragrant Aroma

⁴ Compare 2 Timothy 3:12 and Revelation 1:9

⁵ Doctrine and creedal statements are understood to be essential to Biblical Christianity.

⁶ Compare Ezekiel 34:1-10; Is. 1:23; Jeremiah 5:1; Ezekiel 22; Hosea 4:1-3; Amos 2:6-8; Micah 6:8; Habakkuk 1:4; Zephaniah 1:9; Micah 2:10ff

Philippians 4:18, "But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God."

With this Paul uses the language of worship to describe the activity of ministry. Let's look at each of these words. From God's perspective, when we serve the saints we are a sweet smell or fragrant aroma. This is the language of the burnt offering.

In the Old Testament sacrificial system there were three types of offerings. The first of these is the expiatory offering or the sin and guilt offerings. The second is the consecratory offerings —which included the burnt offering, the cereal offering, and the drink offering. And finally the communal offerings —which included the peace offering, the wave offering, the thank offering, the votive offering, the freewill offering, and the ordination offering.

Now of all the offerings, it is only of the Consecratory Offerings that the Bible speaks of as being a "fragrant aroma to the Lord."

Unlike the sin/guilt offering or the peace offerings which spoke of sins forgiven and fellowship restored, the burnt offering spoke of total consecration to the Lord. With the sin and peace offering, select portions of the animal were given either to the priest or the worshipper. With the burnt offering, the whole of the animal — except some incidental parts — was consumed on the altar, and thus ascended to God in the form of smoke which Scripture says was, "a soothing aroma."

And so, how is it that this offering was a "soothing aroma?"

It is not — as liberals have suggested — that the smoke somehow pacified God. Rather, it is that God is all about fellowshiping with His people such that when a person brought an offering to the Lord, laid his hands on its head — thereby identifying himself with the animal — and then offered up the animal wholly unto God as a statement of the intention of his heart, the Lord took great delight not in the sacrifice, but in the passion and hunger of the worshipper.

Family of God this is what service in the Kingdom of God is all about. It is about serving Christ by serving the saints! When we do this no matter the sacrifice inflicted to ourselves, the wound incurred, or how deep the knife may penetrate our heart **ALL OF IT IS BUT A SACRIFICE OF PRAISE — A FRAGRANT AROMA — TO THE LORD!**

When Paul was attacking God's people, thinking them to be apostate, God spoke to the apostle, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4).

When it comes to the body of Christ, that which ultimately is being addressed is Christ Himself. Thus to pour your life out for an ungrateful, wretched being is not to waste your life but to spend it on Christ!

Matthew 25:40, "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

And so, all ministry done in the name of Christ ultimately is to Christ- and so ascends to Him as the aroma of a burnt offering.

The Consolation: Acceptable Sacrifice

Yet this is only a third of it.

Philippians 4:18, “But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, **a sacrifice⁷ acceptable⁸**, wellpleasing to God.”

When a sacrifice was offered in the Old Testament with the right motives in the right way, God pronounced the incredible statement: Acceptable!

Do you understand what that means?

It means that the God of heaven and earth welcomes you into His presence. He is well-pleased not only with the sacrifice, but also with the worshipper!

Family of God, don't miss it! Pagans spend their entire lives endeavoring to know that they are acceptable to their god. It is why they work so diligently. It is why they are so fanatical.

The Consolation: Wellpleasing

Philippians 4:18, “But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, **wellpleasing⁹ to God.**”

Yet listen! If you are in Christ, your service in His name ALWAYS IS ACCEPTABLE! And yet that still is not all. Not only is our service in Christ "a fragrant aroma and acceptable," it also is well-pleasing to God.

When a sacrifice is "well-pleasing to God," we have gone way beyond the consideration of whether or not it is good enough for God to accept it Or even if there might be some hidden blemish which might disqualify the offering.

Indeed! We are at the point where God is taking delight in His work manifested in you! Thus "well-pleasing" is the God of heaven and earth exalting in you!

That family of God is the message that the Philippians needed to hear. Though they had indeed suffered much for the body of Christ, nevertheless they must know that the God of heaven and earth NOT ONLY derived satisfaction from their sacrifice of praise BUT ALSO looked upon the Philippians as a spotless and glorious vessel of honor in whom He took much delight!

I need to explain how this is possible. Truly, it is so unbelievable!

What person could offer a sacrifice without sin?

⁷ θυσια thusia

⁸ δεκτος dektos

⁹ ευαρεστος euarestos

What service could we ever render to God that would not fall beneath His standards of perfection?

Who can serve/worship God with a clear conscience?

Therefore, how could God exalt Himself in us?

Though we are terribly sinful — wretched from the womb — nevertheless when a person comes to Christ, Christ becomes their sacrifice. God pricks the heart of the sinner and shows him that in spite of his efforts, it only takes one sin to condemn an individual to hell for eternity.¹⁰ And yet, through God's regenerating grace the sinner sees that Christ not only is the spotless sacrifice who can take away God's wrath¹¹ BUT that Christ is his sacrifice.¹²

And so like the worshipper of old, the sinner lays his hands on the Lamb of God confessing his sin. He pulls out his knife and draws it across the Lamb's neck spilling His blood. The blood — representing the life of the Lamb¹³ — is sprinkled on the altar. And the sinner is forgiven.

And yet, the offering is not yet over.

For as much as we might like, we cannot climb upon the altar to offer ourselves in dedication to the Lord — for the fire still would consume us. And so, the worshipper places the Lamb of God on the altar of burnt offering and gives to the Lord their act of dedication: Jesus Christ!

And do you know what God does? He accepts the worshipper as Christ Himself.

Ephesians 5:2, “And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.”

From all of this we see that the delight that God has as we offer ourselves to Him is the delight that He takes in His Son. Every offering we ever could offer in the name of God is nothing less than Christ Himself!

And that is what a Sacrifice of Praise is all about! The encouragement that Paul gives to the Philippians in our text! It is the message that God gives to all His servants.

As we pour our lives out in the service of God's kingdom the fragrance of Christ is released.¹⁴ And thus however mean and weak may be our service, nevertheless it rises up before God as "a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God!

In this context, I ask this: Does it really matter as to the means that God has appointed for us to glorify Christ, so long as Christ is honored? Does it matter whether God calls us to an easy or hard ministry does it matter, so long as your offering is acceptable to the Lord?

Truly, some are feet, others are hands, but the comfort is in knowing that all work for the glory of the Lord!

¹⁰ Compare Romans 6:23

¹¹ Compare John 1:29 and Romans 3:25

¹² Compare 2 Corinthians 5:21

¹³ Compare Leviticus 17:11

¹⁴ Compare 2 Corinthians 2:14 and 1 Peter 2:5

1 Corinthians 9:23, “And this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.”

For Paul it didn't matter how the Lord used him — just that He used him! And thus when he was in a pit called, "Roman Prison," and God had chosen to use his bonds as a means to proclaim Christ, he wrote these words;

Philippians 1:18, “What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.”

Oh, what joy we should have in knowing that whatever may be our calling this day and with whomever we may have been called to serve Christ receives our feeble and ignoble acts of service as unto Himself, and therefore rejoices in them!

But this is where we get hung up:

When it comes to the externals of our calling, it does matter!

When Peter was forewarned of the difficult life ahead of him, all he could do was ask about John's life.¹⁵ And when we give ourselves to the flesh, we even say forget about Christ's honor, what about ours?

Yes our chief end is to glorify God, but what about our glory? It is good if God's kingdom advances, so long as it doesn't interfere with the advancement of my own agenda.

Simon the Magician

Recall Simon the Magician in Acts 8. He wanted the privilege of being able to touch people so that the Spirit of God would rest upon them.¹⁶ In fact, he wanted it so badly that he offered to pay the apostles for the gift.¹⁷ In other words, the things of the Lord became a means for the advancement of his own agenda, glory, and honor!

Recall how Peter rebuked him.

Acts 8:20-23, “But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.”

Oh what an ugly sacrifice we can be found offering to the Lord sometimes!

We offer service in our own names, for our own sakes, unto our glory, to advance our goals. This is the strange fire that the Lord will not receive.

¹⁵ Compare John 21:21

¹⁶ Compare Acts 8:19

¹⁷ Compare Acts 8:18

It better not be.

It wasn't the service of Peter who rebuked Simon. It wasn't the service of Paul who warned of those who adulterate the gospel.¹⁸ And it better not be yours.

We are not talking about ministry in Christ's name tainted by my weakness, sin, and inability. We are talking about ministry in my name according to my agenda. From this we must repent and flee!

John Calvin wrote this:

“Alas for our indolence!- which appears in this, that while God invites us with so much kindness to the honour of priesthood, and even puts sacrifices in our hands, we nevertheless do not sacrifice to him, and those things which were set apart for sacred oblations we not only lay out for profane uses, but squander them wickedly upon the most polluted contaminations.”¹⁹

God has given you health — and what have you done with it? God has given you money — whom have you served with it? God has given you resources — and you've consumed them for yourself. God has given you a job — and all you can do is gripe. God has given you a difficult responsibility — and you have neglected it in the name of self-preservation. God has given a difficult person in your life — and you have trampled him/her underfoot!

It is no wonder that the church is filled with such empty people. We have taken the things that God has intended for His service, and sought to derive satisfaction from them. We have sought blessing from the Lord that, “we might spend it on our pleasures” (James 4:3). We have adulterated the gospel!

Family of God, listen. There is no greater comfort in all the world than knowing that God accepts the service we offer in His name.

Accordingly, let's get out of the business of self-service. Let us take every thing in our life as from the hand of the Lord. Let us endeavor to serve the Lord according to His calling. And even though we may stumble and fall herein, nevertheless in Christ God will receive our service as, "...a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to the Lord!"

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¹⁸ Compare 2 Corinthians 4:2

¹⁹ Calvins Commentaries, Volume XXI, Philippians, page 128

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on May 2, 2004. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.