

Jonestown Bible Church

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But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need, because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly, so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold people like him in high regard, because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to compensate for your absence in your service to me, Philippians 2:24-30.

June 9, 2022

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As a number of our church family have been going through times of suffering and loss, it has been so beautiful to see those who have come along side the hurting, seeking to bring comfort and encouragement. These saints remind me of a man who, while encouraging and comforting others, he himself became sick unto death himself because of his selfless ministry. While in prison the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Philippi concerning this man. We find in Philippians chapter 2 that Paul had confidence that he was going to be able to visit the people of Philippi soon. We are not sure why he felt he would be getting out of prison, but it is obvious he sensed he was. He wanted to get this letter to them, so he said he would send a man named Epaphroditus, who was originally from that area. Paul defines this dear friend in verse 25-26; *But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.*

He had ministered to Paul's needs during his time in prison. His ministry to the apostle was so selfless that he got sick and was near death. The people at Philippi had heard he was sick and obviously were upset about it. As a sign of what a completely selfless man he was, Epaphroditus was burdened because he had caused them to be upset. He is a tremendous illustration of the selfless servant. In verse 27, Paul says that God had mercy on both Epaphroditus and himself by healing Epaphroditus. Mercy is a misunderstood word. It means to withhold misery or to take it away, and in this case God took away the illness of His servant Epaphroditus. The Philippians would not know this until Epaphroditus showed up in Philippi with the letter from Paul in his hand. We can only imagine the joyous reunion when Epaphroditus returned home. Paul knew the people would rejoice and would love to see him again.

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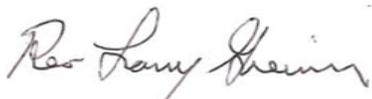
This is a great mark of believers with a servant's heart. They have a deep capacity to hurt when others in the family of God hurt and rejoice when they rejoice. In verse 30, Paul uses a term that is translated, "risking his life;" or, "hazarding his life." It is the word, "paraboleuomai," which means quite literally, "to throw aside" (para, aside, and ballo, to throw), hence to expose oneself to danger, to hazard one's life. It is a gambler's word. It means to stake everything on a toss of the dice! What Paul is saying is that for the sake of Jesus Christ, Epaphroditus gambled with his life.

In the days of the early church, there was an association of men and women call the Parabolani, the gamblers. It was their aim and object to visit the prisoners and the sick, especially those who were ill with dangerous and infectious diseases. In A.D. 252, a plague broke out in Carthage. The heathen threw out the bodies of their dead and fled in terror. Cyprian gathered his congregation together and set them to burying the dead and nursing the sick in the plague-stricken city. And, by so doing, the city was saved from destruction and desolation at the risk of the lives of those who helped.

May we continue to seek to lift up and encourage our brothers and sisters in the Lord who are hurting. May the Lord give us a heart like that of Epaphroditus who was genuinely concerned about the welfare of others more than himself. We will always need the parabolani, people like Epaphroditus, who through courage and passion will always be willing to risk their own lives to serve the Lord and their fellow-brothers and sisters in Christ.

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, Colossians 3:12.

By His Grace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Pastor Larry".

Pastor Larry