

Rick Miller – Isaiah 39 – Mar. 19, 2023

Lord, we ask that you show us areas in our life where we have blind spots and we need your illumination to make changes. We thank you that you're faithful to do that, as we humble ourselves before your cross. We commit this time to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

So Isaiah 39 ...

1At that time Merodach-Baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered.

2And Hezekiah was pleased with them, and showed them the house of his treasures—the silver and gold, the spices and precious ointment, and all his armory—all that was found among his treasures. There was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them.

3Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah, and said to him, “What did these men say, and from where did they come to you?” So Hezekiah said, “They came to me from a far country, from Babylon.”

4And he said, “What have they seen in your house?” So Hezekiah answered, “They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them.”

5Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the Lord of hosts:

6‘Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,’ says the Lord.

7‘And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.’”

8So Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the Lord which you have spoken is good!” For he said, “At least there will be peace and truth in my days.”

So not a great reaction to that, right? Interesting story of King Hezekiah because you know as we've studied through Isaiah we know that there's this kind of pattern in the book of Isaiah that some liken to the whole pattern of the Bible.

There are 66 books in the Bible. There are 66 chapters in Isaiah. The first 39 chapters of Isaiah tend to have more of a judgment feel, similar to the 39 books in the Old Testament. Then the remaining 27 chapters in Isaiah reflect the 27 books of the New Testament that speak more of grace.

So this is kind of a transition chapter, Isaiah 39, and then you'll see in chapter 40, if you turn over there, it says: "Comfort, yes, comfort my people says your God, speak comfort to Jerusalem. Right away you start to get this whole different vibe as you move into chapters 40 through 66.

Okay, we're coming out of this time of chastisement and judgment. We're coming into a season of blessing. I think that's important to keep in mind in our lives as Christians, as God does take us through difficult times because he's molding us, he's forming us. He's taking away those things that are displeasing to him.

Often it's through trials and tribulations that we kind of shed fleshly life and draw more toward the spirit. Similar to this first section of Isaiah where God is bringing a lot of correction, a lot of judgment, but he's doing it with the heart of 'I want to bring you into a place of blessing.'

Of course that's God's ultimate heart, right? He's taking us to heaven ultimately and we know that's going to be eternal glory. So we know God's heart. That's what he wants for us. And even in this, he wants to conform us to the image of Christ, right? And to the degree that we cooperate with that process, I think it's going to go a lot smoother for us if we're humbling ourselves or we're seeking him in his word, if we're going to church.

You know, we're just doing the basics that God's called us to, spending time alone with the Lord and those kind of practical things. We're putting ourselves in a position where the Lord can speak to us.

He can deal with things in our life he wants to change because he does want to bring us into that abundant Christian life, victorious Christian life. He doesn't want us to always be defeated, discouraged, depressed and anxious. He wants to bring us out of those things. So to me it's a relatively short and interesting chapter where the Lord is really focusing in on the heart of Hezekiah.

Hezekiah gets a lot of attention in the book of Isaiah. I'm not sure I would want God focusing in on my life and then writing it in public for everybody to read like we're doing with Hezekiah.

He just happens to be the guinea pig here where. I'm going to focus on this guy's heart and show you what he's like. But it's really the story of all of us, right? Human nature is human nature. We're all fallen.

We can look at Hezekiah here in this story and say, wow, you seem kind of self-centered. I mean, what a way to respond to a prophecy. Like, oh, judgment's coming - well, as long as it's not coming to my life, good! You know, it'll come to my kids and my grandkids and it's like, what???. But it really just shows how self-centered a person can be and that ultimately we have the same issue.

So what we're going to do is spend a little bit of time in chapter 39. Then we're going to jump over to Philippians, chapter 2, which in praying and preparing, I really felt like there's such a link into that chapter. We're studying Philippians on Wednesday nights and we did chapter 2 a couple weeks ago and it all seemed to fit.

So I want to spend some time talking about Philippians too, but let's go through this quickly. We see in Isaiah 39:1 where the King of Babylon sends this message to Hezekiah saying, hey, you've been sick, I'm glad you recovered. He sends these messengers with the letters and a present to Hezekiah. Now, right off the bat, that would make Hezekiah feel pretty important.

Babylon is, as you know, not the strongest nation in the world at this time, but it would become later. Assyria was the ruling empire at that time but Babylon was a potential ally with Judah against the Assyrian empire. So one reason that Hezekiah was wanting to entertain these guests in his palace was that they could be potential allies and vice versa.

Babylon was looking for ways to rebel against the Assyrians. But as we learned in the last chapter, chapter 38, Hezekiah was sick, almost about to die but he called upon the Lord and the Lord gave him 15 more years. Hezekiah, for the most part, was a righteous king. The Bible says he was a righteous king. But just like, as Christians, we're trying to serve the Lord, we're trying to live for the Lord, but we do have these areas of pride and selfishness that God wants to purge out of our lives.

Part of Christian growth is learning those areas of pride, learning those areas of self-centeredness, and becoming more Christ-like, more giving to God, more giving to others.

So Hezekiah feels pretty important that this Babylonian envoy came to him with letters and a present from the King of Babylon. Then it says in verse 2,

Hezekiah was pleased with them and showed them the house of his treasures and was really showing off all the wealth he had, the armory, the military power they had.

It says there was nothing in his house or dominion that Hezekiah did not show them. Really, in a sense, he was showing off. And of course, as believers, we have to be careful of that. Maybe God's given us certain gifts or certain blessings in our life. You don't want to be showing those things off.

You want to have those things in their proper place in your heart and mind where you realize, hey, God has blessed me with this, this is a gift I've been given, I'm no better than others. I just want to make sure I use the gift that God has given me for his glory. Like, what does it say ... "To him who's been given much, much is required?"

So if you've been given some super talent or ability to make money, then God requires more of you. He requires that you give more money. He requires that you use that talent for His glory. Have you ever seen somebody like, wow, I wish I could sing like that person?

Why did that person get that gift to be able to sing or that athletic ability to be able to play well? You know, they have more to answer for because they have an ability to influence more people. Are they using that gift, that vocal gift for their glory and their own purposes? Or are they giving that for the glory of God?

That's a challenge we all have, to say, Lord, am I using the gifts you've given me for your glory? You know, it's interesting here, Hezekiah was so excited about showing off to the Babylonians all of his wealth; probably the better thing for him to have done was to show off his spiritual wealth.

Like, hey, let me show you guys the writings of Genesis, the Pentateuch, right? The five books of the law. Of course by this time Solomon had written his writings. This was several hundred years after David and Solomon. So Hezekiah would have had a lot of the word of God at that time.

That was one of the greatest responsibilities Israel had, to write down the word of God, to pass it on to the next generation. They had the prophets and that was really one of their greatest treasures, the word of God that they were given for the rest of the world. And yet Hezekiah wasn't showing that off.

He was showing off his material treasures. Of course, Babylon in the Bible represents the world system that's hostile toward God. You see Babylon right in the book of Genesis, going all the way through Revelation, where it is a symbol of the world that's hostile against God, saying, we're not to be friends with the world, we're not to seek to impress the world. We're not to seek their approval, right?

The Bible says don't love the world or that we're not to love the world. We're to love the things of God and we really get off track if we are focused on trying to impress the world.

We had dinner last night at Marla's house and some of us were sharing our testimonies and I was sharing about when I got saved as a young man. When you're a teenager it's really important to be cool, right? I mean, that's a big thing. And I didn't want to be called a Jesus freak, because it was definitely not cool to be a Jesus freak.

But when the Lord dealt with me and my eyes were open I said I don't care what they call me, I'm going for Jesus. So sure enough, my friends would come and realize, oh, I don't want to hang around Rick anymore. You know, he talks about Jesus, he goes to church, and we're trying to have fun and get high over here.

And I came to realize I can never try to be cool for these guys. I remember this one friend of mine. He was thinking about becoming a Christian, but he still had one foot in the world, one foot in the church and he was trying to kind of reconcile me with my party friends.

I remember he invited me to go skateboarding with him one time and I'm like, this isn't working, you know. I'm not going to be able to hang out with these guys anymore. And they're kind of laughing at me. And this one guy, he's trying to somehow play a role in reconciling me with my friends who had rejected me. And it was like, I don't want anything to do with this.

Well, all those guys ended up getting saved eventually. So we need to stand for the Lord, not try to impress the world or be cool to the world. You're never going to be cool to the world as a Jesus person. But this is what Hezekiah was doing, trying to impress the world, trying to impress the Babylonians with all of his riches, all of his gifts.

And then as we see in verse 3, he gets rebuked by Isaiah. Then we jump down to verse 5. He says, *"Hear the word of the Lord. Behold, the days are coming*

when all that is in your house and what your fathers have accumulated until this day shall be carried to battle and nothing shall be left.”

That might even seem like a harsh way for God to respond to this. ‘Well, all I did was show them, you know, what I had in my treasuries.’ But for one thing it was foolish because the Babylonians, when they were looking at the treasuries that Hezekiah had, they're thinking, oh man, that would look pretty good in my palace. We're going to come and take all that stuff.

That's really what their heart was; they weren't trying to be friends with Hezekiah. So he was really being foolish. He was not being realistic about who his enemies were. And, so the Lord says, yeah, all this is going to be taken away.

Of course this would happen. I think it's about 150 years after this, where the nation of Judah is taken into captivity into Babylon. And sure enough, just like the Lord said, all of that wealth was taken from Judah into Babylon and they were held captives for 70 years until the remnant came back to Jerusalem.

So it's interesting because again, I think it shows the work of the Lord in our lives that he wants to set us free of the things that we're clinging to, the worldly things that we're holding on to. The Lord says, look, I want you to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these material things will be added unto you. That's what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount.

So when we're holding on to worldly things too tightly the Lord says, look, you don't have an eternal perspective. You know some people will even refuse to go into ministry or to missions because they're like, well no, I have to hang on to my job. I have hang on to my wealth.

If I give up my job and follow the Lord in this calling, what am I going to do financially? Not trusting that the Lord will take care of them. I think we're all at different points in that scale of our spiritual growth, where God says, hey, you're very carnal. You're very much hanging onto worldly things. I have to really deal with you in a harsher kind of way to get your attention.

Whereas some of us may be further along in our growth, where some things, worldly things in our hearts, are more subtle and the Lord wants to speak with us and deliver us from hanging on to worldly things.

So we see in verse 8 where he responds and says, well this is good because at least there will be peace and truth in my days. We see his heart of selfishness, of

not being concerned with others, with his family and his children, his grandchildren. This is also what the Lord speaks into our lives about not being focused on ourselves, being other-oriented.

This is where I wanted to turn over to Philippians and see what Paul had to say to the Philippian church about that kind of self-centered, self-focused life that the Lord wants to deliver us from, so that we can be fruitful in the kingdom of God. In Philippians chapter 2 we actually have four examples of people who did humble themselves, did walk in the purposes of God, and their lives had meaning. Their lives were fruitful for the Lord.

I think there's a lot we can learn from these four examples. The first one will be Christ, who of course, is the perfect example. The second example will be the Apostle Paul, then Timothy and then a man named Epaphroditus. So let's jump into Philippians 2:1.

1Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

I want to read that in the New Living Translation also.

1Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? 2Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

And then the next verse says:

3Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

So that's where we see Hezekiah definitely was not looking out for the interests of others. Even as a righteous king he had definite character flaws.

Again, even as Christians where we want to please the Lord, we want to do well, we can still have these character flaws that God is working on. And of course, Philippians is written to Christians, it's written to believers. One thing that's important to understand as you read the epistles, Paul is assuming that you're involved in a church.

Sometimes I counsel Christians that are struggling and I always try to go to the basics. First of all I say, well, are you attending church regularly? Are you spending time with the Lord in devotional time? Are you reading the Bible?

If they're not doing any of those things it really shows a lack of commitment even in the basic things in their life. So no wonder you're having so much turmoil you can't even get up and go to church. You can't be part of the fellowship. In the New Testament, it is assumed that you are being a vital part of the body of Christ.

We read in the book of Acts where it talks about the converts that were fellowshiping, breaking bread, going from house to house in prayer and the apostle's doctrine. You can read that pattern in the Book of Acts, how the believers were very committed to the word of God, to fellowshiping with one another, breaking bread together. They spent time with one another and that's how you're going to be built up as a Christian.

And yet even those of us who are committed to being in church, to spending time in the word, we still have many things God wants to change in us, right? But if you're not even there yet, like consistently coming to church, you have a whole separate problem that you really need to think about because you're really in a place of rebellion.

I hate to say that, but the Bible says 'do not forsake the assembling of the brethren as is the habit of some especially as you see the day approaching.' So you really need to think about your commitment level. It's interesting to me, like I'm driving to church this morning, and of course the roads are clear.

I always thought, wouldn't that be interesting? Because I get up Monday morning and try to drive to school and it's packed with cars and I thought where is everybody on Sunday morning? Really where is everybody? I understand they're not going to work, but why aren't more people going to church? Because even people who normally don't go on the freeway in the morning, Sunday, you should be going to church, you should be on the freeway, going to church. But obviously, in our country, the percentage of people who go to church has been going down.

What do they say; in Europe it's really low now. It's like 5% or something. But for a saved person who's a Christian, you kind of understand that this is where I need to be in church. So we see Paul writing to these Christians in Philippi who are part of the body of Christ, but they still have these issues.

You can read between the lines here where Paul, I believe, is indicating there is some strife going on among these believers and he's encouraging them to think about the better things. Instead of coming to church and fighting with one another or fighting amongst your family, think about the blessings that there are in Christ, just like we experienced this morning in the prayer meeting, in our worship time, the power of the Spirit and the comfort of the Spirit and the fellowship of the Spirit and praying for one another.

That's what Paul is saying in verse one, is there any encouragement? Is there comfort? Is there fellowship in the spirit? So think about those things. That's where you should be instead of fighting with one another. Be of one mind instead of just focusing on your own selfish ambition. Verse 3, 'But be humble the way you interact with one another and think of others as better than yourself'.

And man, that can be a problem we have, right? We meet someone and we think, oh yeah, I'm better than him. Or I make more money than them or I'm whatever, skinnier than them. You know we make these judgements and that's pride. It really is just pride. But we often make judgements about other people and we don't know the whole story about that person, right?

You might say, oh, why don't you get a job, you bum? Well, you don't know the story about that person. You don't know where they've come from. If you were in their shoes you might be worse off than they are. So be compassionate. Don't be so quick to judge others. Let's think of others as better than ourselves.

Like you judge that bum, I shouldn't even call them a bum, should I? But you know a person who's in a difficult place and they're not working. They don't seem to be providing for themselves and are kind of dependent on others. You might look down on that person, but you know, maybe if they had the same giftings you did and the same opportunities, they might be doing better than you are.

So we have to really try to be humble and not make judgements on other people. And then verse 4, "*Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*"

See that's really what we're being called to as Christians, and we see that in these four different examples in Christ, in Paul, in Timothy and Epaphroditus.

I think that's what Paul is setting up here with the Philippian church, that there was some strife in the church, there was selfishness and Paul wanted to address

this, and what better way than have us think about the person of Christ. So let's read verses 5 through 11.

5Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. So notice what he says, verse 5, "let this mind be in you."

We have to have a certain mindset and too often we can have kind of a worldly mindset, but our mindset, our goal, is to be like Christ.

Look at what he did. He didn't hold onto his position of actually being God, part of the Trinity. He said, no, I'm going to obey the Father. I'm willing to humble myself to do what the Father is telling me to do. Sometimes there may be a need in the church or an area of service, and you're like, well, I'm really too good for that.

It's funny, Pastor Chuck would tell the story of how some people would come to him. "Hey, God's called me to start preaching, I should be up there in front of everybody like you." Pastor Chuck would say, okay, well go see Ramon, or go see my administrative guy and he'll set you up with cleaning the toilets or something first, we'll start you there.

And the guy was like, what, me do that? I'm too good for that. And then Chuck would know right away. Oh, well yeah, you're not qualified to be a preacher. So sometimes we think, oh I'm too good for that. But we just need to have the attitude, Lord, I'll do whatever is needed.

I just want to serve you. Don't you get that heart of gratitude where you see how much God is blessing you and you're like, Lord, I just want to return it in service toward you. That service is going to look different for all of us, right? We're all at different places. We can't really compare ourselves to other people.

But it's important that each of us have that commitment to the Lord to be willing to serve him in whatever he calls us. It could be a season where your life's more geared toward intercessory prayer, or it could be a season where you're able to serve more at the church. Or it could be serving your family, your children in that regard.

But we want to be careful about being so self-focused on our needs that we miss what God's calling us to, how to serve him. And then verse 8:

8And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. 9Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So you see in that passage Jesus humbling himself to the lowest place and then being exalted to the highest place. I think there's a message for us as we humble ourselves and serve the Lord in what he's calling us to, there is going to be a reward. And then this next section, verses 12 through 17, we will see Paul's example of serving the Lord and being oriented toward God and others. So verse 12:

12Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

So this idea of we're saved but now we're working out our salvation with fear and trembling. In other words, we're very concerned with God's opinion of us, where we are in our life. Lord, am I in the place you want me to be? Is my heart and mind in that place of worship and service to you? But on the flip side of that, it says it is God who works in you, both to will and to do, for his good pleasure.

You might say, well, no, I'm not in the place of serving the Lord and living for him. I just find I'm so focused on myself and my own needs. I don't even really see myself serving the Lord at all. So that's where you, as verse 13 says, call upon the Lord to work in you that you would be willing to do his good pleasure. You see how that works? That's the beauty of God's grace, where we say, Lord, I have fear and trembling before you. I don't want to stand before you on the day of judgment, the judgment seat of Christ, where my life is being looked at.

How did you live for me as a Christian? I don't want to be ashamed on that day. That's the fear and trembling part. Then the part where you realize God's working in you, then you could say, Lord, I cry out to you, give me willingness to serve you. Show me how I am to serve you. Give me the power to serve you. You're realizing that ultimately it's God who works in you both to will and to do for his good pleasure. And then it says in verse 14:

14Do all things without complaining and disputing, 15that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain. 17Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

So you see Paul will often mention the day of Christ, like he's thinking about the day when he's going to stand before Christ and give an account for his life. Again, that's the fear and trembling part. But notice what he says in verse 14. Just don't complain. Don't fight with one another. Don't dispute.

That's how you are to be a light in the world. When people look at you and you're complaining and you're fighting in your family or with others and your children might look at you and say, well you know, you just taught me a Bible study, but now you're fighting with your spouse and that's a contradiction to them.

We want to be blameless, harmless. When we're complaining and disputing, it's often because self is on the throne and we're trying to defend our position. We're trying to defend ourselves. And you know, we could all have things to complain about, right? But it's better to just say, Lord, I lay those things at your feet and I want to live a life of gratitude toward you, not complaining about things, not disputing. And then verse 17:

17Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

That's the point I really wanted to drive toward. We saw the example of Christ humbling himself serving God, and now we see Paul saying, hey, my life is about being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith.

So Paul was pouring into people. The drink offering was when the priest would offer the animal sacrifice they would also take like a cup of wine and pour it out during the sacrifice. That represented the blood being poured out. The Bible says the life is in the blood so you're pouring out your life to God in service, in worship, and in sacrifice.

And you know, it's interesting, I was praying for the kids in the school and thinking about what the Lord's doing here and I really believe the Lord spoke to me that as the teachers have this opportunity to just pour into these children every day, that God is going to use that and he's going to raise up a lot of these children as leaders.

We just don't know. We may have the next Billy Graham that we're teaching here. You really don't know. Some churches are preaching to thousands of people, maybe not going so deep with those people. But then you have opportunities like in our church, where we're going deeper.

We're able to spend all day with these kids and share the word of God with them, share stories about our lives. I was really thinking of Mercedes' class. I teach part of that class with the older kids and now we're up to what, eight kids. She's able to pour into them all day, every day and to mentor them. The Lord's just shown me - I brought those specific kids for a reason - and he's going to use those kids.

So it's a great privilege to pour into people's lives and don't give up on them when they seem like they're not getting it right. You minister to teenagers, they don't seem real responsive many times. Or you're ministering to a broken person and you've been trying to minister to this person for years and they're just not responding. And we might even think, how do I say this, we might get frustrated with them, like they're just not getting it. What's wrong with them?

Don't think like that. No, that's where the Lord has been showing me you need to let the spirit of truth show you the truth about that person and you're being overly judgmental toward that person. I want you to pray for them in this way. Isn't that beautiful, where the Lord can sort it all out? But don't assume you're thinking correctly about that person because you're probably not. Or thinking correctly about yourself.

This is something recently the Lord's been showing me in a deeper way. The spirit of truth, he shows me what's true. I have to yield to him. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. I'm just clinging to Jesus. Lord, show me the truth about my life, myself, you, people I minister to. I don't have a clue.

I have my judgements and they're mostly wrong if it's in the flesh. It just is and, if we want to walk in the spirit, what we're called to do, he'll sort all that out for us. So we're to pour out ourselves as a drink offering into other people's lives. Jesus did it. Paul did it.

Well, that was Jesus but I'm no Jesus, right? Well yeah, but you're being conformed to the image of Jesus. That's what the Holy Spirit's doing. And you say, well, I'm no Paul. Okay, well maybe you're a Timothy, right? So let's read about Timothy, verse 19.

19 "But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state."

Paul was concerned about other people. Isn't that great to call people up? How are you doing, man? How's your faith? Are you walking with the Lord? How are you doing. I'm concerned about you. Can I pray with you? Of course, Paul couldn't pick up the phone, so he sent Timothy.

Then notice what he says about Timothy, verse 20:

20 For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. 21 For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus.

I'll tell you that hit me the other day when I read that. Now think about this. This is Paul, he's sitting in prison and he's talking about Christians now.

Of course he wouldn't find anybody like-minded in the world. He's saying in the church I don't have anyone else like-minded who will sincerely care for your state. So it makes me think, wow, do I really care for the state of others or am I like most of the other Christian leaders? Apparently, if I'm reading this right, at the time of Paul they really didn't care about the state of others. What is he saying?

"21 For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus.

He's talking about Christians here so I have to assume, okay, that's kind of all of our normal state. We don't really care that much about the state of others.

We mostly care for our own stuff. We just do. That's who we are and we just admit it. That's who you are. But don't you want to rise to that place where you could be viewed by God or by a leader like Paul to say, wow, this guy really cares about others. And he seeks the things which are of Christ Jesus. So what does that mean? It just makes me fall at the feet of Jesus and say, Lord, I want to be like this.

I know by my nature I'm focused on myself. But Lord, I want to be like you. I want to be like Paul. Lord, help me to care for others. You might not be a Paul,

you might not be the leader, but you can connect with Paul and say, Paul, what's your vision. Oh, I want to help you Paul.

Can you imagine the privilege. You're going to the prison and Paul's there in prison. I guess people were embarrassed to be associated with him and it was also dangerous to be associated with him, to go visit somebody in a Roman prison. It's not like the prisons here.

In our prisons today, you get three meals, a TV. In a way it's almost too easy. Back then if your family didn't bring you food and blankets, you're on your own. So you starved to death in prison. At one point, I don't remember what book it was, but he says, oh, can you remember to send my blanket.

What? Paul doesn't even have a blanket. You would think the whole church would be rallying around him. Paul, do you have everything you need? Just seems strange to me. But it shows how we can get so caught up in daily life and focused on our own cares. And again, that's where Jesus said, don't do that.

Don't be like the Gentiles. But you seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and God will add all the financial things. He knows the things you need. There are some people, they're so focused on work, it crowds out the things of God. It just does. Verse 22:

22But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel.

I've certainly seen this around the church, where people have proved their character over the years. You know, it's one thing for someone to show up here, and I've had this happen before, like they're really excited about the church and oh yeah, I want to serve the Lord. And then they're gone.

You know, what happened to so-and-so? Oh, they're gone. That's not proven character. Of course the attacks are going to come. That's the point he's making. Character that's not proven isn't really character, right? If life is so easy, your character's never proven, then we don't really know what kind of person you are. But Timothy had proven character. Verse 23:

23Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me. 24But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly.

So that was Timothy. Now quickly Epaphroditus, verse 25:

25Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier.

Now, wouldn't you want to have those titles in relation to a man like the Apostle Paul? Wow! What an honor. Now again, he's no Jesus, he's no Timothy. He's kind of, in a way, like most of us, kind of a no-body. Epaphroditus? Who is Epaphroditus? He's just some guy who is at the Church of Philippi that apparently took a gift to Paul from the church, and now he's going to be sent back to them.

Just a regular guy. But he was faithful, he was a brother, he was a worker, he was a soldier. Don't you love that? Like you want to be a soldier in the kingdom of God? Isn't that cool? You know, sometimes we've thought, what's my identity? I don't know who I am. Are you a soldier? Is that how you see yourself?

Are you a worker? Are you a brother to some leader in the Christian church that you're coming alongside and helping? He ministered to my need. Verse 26:

26since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. 27For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. 28Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. 29Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; 30because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.

So it's interesting, you read between the lines here. Epaphroditus was sent to help Paul. He was sent with a gift from the church and then he got really sick. And the word could have gotten back to the church that Epaphroditus, man, he really let us down. We should have sent somebody healthier, I guess, because here he's sick, he's not even helping Paul. He's being a burden to Paul. What's wrong with Epaphroditus?

And Paul's putting it in perspective. He says, no, no, this man should be respected. You should hold such men in esteem and you should receive him with gladness. Good job Epaphroditus, you almost died for the gospel.

So we're going to stop there, but think about your service to the Lord and in relation to the example of Christ, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus. I think it's a

challenge for all of us to really examine ourselves and say, Lord, I want to be focused on your will, not just on my own concerns. So let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for this challenge. We look at Hezekiah. We can learn lessons from him and all these other men. Lord, we can look within ourselves and see the selfishness and the desire to kind of protect ourselves. But Lord, we need these reminders of pouring ourselves out in service to you and to others.

That's where joy really comes from. Jesus said it's more blessed to give than to receive. And Lord, whatever our service looks like, we cannot compare it to others.

It may be interceding at home. It may be watching our children, it may be serving in the church, but that's between each person and the Lord. But wherever we're at, we're just getting up in the morning and saying, Lord, resurrect me this day to serve you, however that looks, and here's my life. Here am I, send me. And just put that fire in our hearts.

Because Lord, when we stand before you, we want to know you looked at our hearts and will say, 'I saw you really wanted to serve me. You really wanted to pour out your heart to me. I saw your heart. You weren't perfect, but well done, good and faithful servant.' That's what we should be living for.

And as Paul often said, 'the day of Christ Jesus', that's what he was thinking about. We want that for all of us, Lord, for our loved ones. So, Lord, pour out that spirit of revival and a calling that we all just walk in our calling. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.