

"Pressing on with the Mission" Welfare Fraud Philippians 2:19-24

Introduction

- [Slide #1] We all know the story. Prior to 1543 and the publication of *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres* by Nicolaus Copernicus people believed the earth to be the center of the solar system. They believed the sun revolved around the earth. And nowadays we think them utterly foolish.
- It may be 2010 but we are in need of another Copernican Revolution. Paul says in **Philippians 2:21** *for everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ*. The picture that comes to mind when I read what Paul has written is the picture of self at the center of the universe with the real and true Son Christ and his interests revolving around us. *For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ*. And this is happening in, of all places, the church. We are in need of another Copernican Revolution.
- You know what? The world does not revolve around you. If you call yourself a follower of Christ, a Christian believer, your world doesn't revolve around you and your interests. It revolves around the interests of Jesus Christ. He is the center of your universe and everything else in your life revolves around him. So does it? Look at your schedule, your priorities, your time, your calendar, your checkbook. Who's really at the center of your universe?

Transition

The sad thing is when Christ gets displaced and something else moves into the center, and it happens all the time, the church suffers. The church suffers because the mission of the church suffers. When everyone or even a few within a church end up looking out for their own interests instead of the interests of Christ the mission goes kaput and the church languishes like a coon dog on a hot summers day. Paul says in **Philippians 2:19-24** that...[Slide #2]

Big Idea

- **The mission of the church is dependent upon you and me putting and keeping the interests of Christ ahead of our own interests**
- The mission of the church, the mission of gently, lovingly, and compassionately holding out that which is life to people, the good news of Christ crucified for sins, that mission depends upon you placing the interests of Christ ahead of your own interests. The mission stalls when everyone looks out for themselves.

Background

- Apparently this was a problem in the Philippian church. "Paul's chief concern, and the ultimate reason for this letter, is the progress of the gospel in Philippi."¹ Back in chapter 1 Paul felt it necessary to remind the Philippians that their conduct, their behavior was counterproductive to that mission. **Philippians 1:27**. *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves*

¹ Fee, p. 261.

in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. In other words conduct yourselves as a church in a way that keeps you on the mission.

- And then in texts like **Philippians 2:3-4** we get clues as to what the breakdowns were. The Philippians were a bit selfish. A bit lacking in unity. A little less than humble. Too many people concerned about numero uno, a little too concerned about their own interests. So Paul writes to them *do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Transition

Now to our text for this morning. **Philippians 2:19-24.**

- The Philippian church needed a **Copernican Revolution**. They needed someone to model for them a different way of life. A Christ centered way of life. A life that put the interests of Christ ahead of self. And so Paul writes to them and tells them Timothy's coming. Look at **verse 19**. *I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon.* In answer to what the Philippian church needed most Paul sends his partner in ministry; he sends Timothy. What Paul gives us in **verses 19-24** is a description of this man Timothy who modeled a truly Christ-centered way of life. Paul points to Timothy as a model of the selfless attitude that he wants the church in Philippi to follow. If the church adopts Timothy's way of life it keeps the whole church on the mission Jesus launched. **Philippians 2:19-24.**

Organizational Sentence

- **Two ways you can tell if your world revolves around you or around Christ**

Transition

Look at **verses 19-21**. Your world revolves more around you than around Christ if you fail to **take genuine interest in the welfare of others by serving them.** [Slide #3]

Main Points

- Listen. *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 takes a genuine interest in your welfare. 21 For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.*
- The contrast between Timothy's own deep concern for the Philippian church and the mindset of others is striking isn't it? *For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.* But not Timothy.
- The words that Paul uses to describe Timothy are astounding aren't they? *No one else like him.* Timothy is more than a stand up kind of guy; he's one of a kind. And the reason Paul has no one quite like Timothy is not because all Christian believers at the time were selfish. No. The reason Paul has no one quite like Timothy is because all the others he might have sent to Philippi from Rome where Paul was imprisoned were too concerned about their own affairs rather than the cause of Jesus Christ.²
- But Timothy was different. And the reason Timothy was different was because Timothy's interest were the same as Christ's interests—he cared for people. Paul says in **verse 20** *I*

² O'Brien, p. 321.

have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. Timothy took genuine interest in the welfare of others.

- The reason Paul trusted sending Timothy was because he knew Timothy's character. He knew that Timothy, if sent, would go as a servant and not to be served. He would go to meet needs not consume as one who is needy. He would put others first instead of putting himself first. Paul could count on Timothy because Timothy was more concerned about the welfare of others, serving them, than his own welfare. He was more concerned about the interests of Christ than his own.
- In other words, Timothy's character, servant, was consistent with the gospel; the kind of character defined by **Philippians 2:3-4** and the description of Christ in 2:5-11.³ Paul hoped Timothy would function as a Copernicus-like figure and rock the me-centered world of the Philippian church.
- 1978. A woman was indicted in Cook County, Illinois for "613 counts of illegally receiving \$150,839 in welfare funds between July 1972 and February 1978."⁴
- 1979. A woman was sentenced to four years in state prison after collecting \$240,000 for more than 60 fictitious children.⁵
- 2007. A woman and her husband, owners of two small businesses, were caught collecting welfare benefits even though they drove a \$76,000 luxury car, shopped at **Neiman Marcus** and **Saks Fifth Avenue** and had \$147,980 stashed in the bedroom dresser.
- October 2009. A woman from Norway deceives Norwegian welfare authorities and collects \$1.4 million over a 23 year period.⁶
- In **verses 19-21** Paul describe a different but equally perverse kind of welfare fraud; the Christian believer, the follower of Christ who's more concerned about his own welfare, her own needs, than the welfare, the needs of others. There is a note of genuine sadness, I think, in Paul's statement as he contemplates the self-centeredness of those whom he might have sent in place of Timothy. "They were 'so warm in pursuing their own interests that they were cold in the work of the Lord.'"⁷
- Seriously. Whose welfare are you looking out for? Who are you serving? In all honesty, who is at the center of your world? *For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.* We have to be asking ourselves, why, in a world of selfishness and self-seeking is it so rare to find a man or a woman who anxious to promote the welfare of other people ahead of their own.⁸ When we think about all that plagues the church it is hard to imagine a better antidote than all God's people putting the interests of others as the matter of first importance.⁹
- The mission of the church, our effectiveness as a body, is dependent upon us putting our own personal interests second and putting the interests of others first. We have to serve, not out

³ Fee, p. 267.3

⁴ *Associated Press*, May 8, 1978, AM cycle, Chicago (available on LEXIS).

⁵ *Associated Press*, June 13, 1979, AM cycle, Compton, CA (available on LEXIS).

⁶ <http://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/artikkel.php?artid=527223>

⁷ O'Brien, p. 322.

⁸ Martin, p. 129-30.

⁹ Fee, p. 270-1.

of compulsion or guilt, but out of gratitude. We serve with thankful hearts because of Christ who served and saved by his death on the cross. So who are you serving? Whose welfare are you looking out for? If you aren't serving, if you are not looking out for the welfare of others you are killing the resolve that others in this church have to be about the mission.

Transition

Two ways you can tell if your world revolves around you or around Christ. The **second** comes in **verses 22-24**. [Slide #4] Your world revolves more around you than around Christ if the **greatest cause in your life is something other than the gospel**.

- Listen. *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.*
- Timothy's proven worth, the reason he was valuable to Paul, was because Paul and Timothy were yoked together in common service for a single cause, *the gospel*.¹⁰ Forget Timothy's interest in others for a second. The reason Timothy ever cared about the welfare of others to begin with was because he cared about the gospel.
- If the gospel isn't your greatest cause as a Christian believer then A) you'll never even get to the point of serving others, of looking out for the welfare of others or B) you'll serve others with wrong or insufficient motives. Too many believers are sold out for causes other than the main cause—the gospel.
- For those of you who are on Facebook you know about Facebook causes. If you haven't used Facebook before there are all kinds of causes out there that you can join and then recruit others for. You name it and there's a cause for it. You can recruit people to the cause of breast cancer awareness, different political issues, anything. There are a billion different causes and probably twice a day, maybe more, I get invited to join the cause of this organization or this issue.
- Listen, especially those of you who were at Districts, if you want to live a centered life with Christ at the center then the greatest cause of your life isn't Free Tibet or save the whales, as good as those things might be, the greatest possible cause is the gospel. If you care at all about putting Jesus' interests ahead of your own then the gospel must be your greatest cause. Your world revolves more around you than around Christ if the **greatest cause in your life is something other than, different than the gospel**.
- Who are you serving? Self? Or the cause of the gospel? Who, like Timothy, is going to take up the cause of the gospel? *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.*
- If the gospel is your greatest cause it may mean some sacrifices. It may mean you leave your job and home for the mission field so that you can care for the welfare of orphans in the Congo. If the gospel is your greatest cause it may mean that you plant a church in inner city Chicago so that you can care for and serve gangbangers. If the gospel is your greatest cause then maybe you're on a plane to Haiti as soon as reasonably possible. If the gospel is your greatest cause then maybe you stick with that difficult marriage and begin serving your spouse instead of perpetuating the warfare. If the gospel is your greatest cause then maybe

¹⁰ Martin, p. 131.

you look at some of the ministry needs that have been in the bulletin and seek to meet those needs. If the gospel is your greatest cause then maybe you use your home as a refuge, as an oasis for those in need. *For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.* The mission of the church depends upon you and me putting and keeping the interests of Christ ahead of our own interests. And that means the gospel is our greatest cause, our deepest passion.

- Let me ask you something. If you're not like this, if the gospel isn't your greatest cause, if you don't care about the welfare of others as much as you should, how do you become that kind of person? How do you become a Timothy? Let me also ask you this, why do little Czech kids grow up speaking with Czech? Why is it that if you grow up in Boston you sound like a Bostonian and if you grow up in the South you sound like a southerner? People grow up imitating those around them.¹¹
- The reason Timothy put the interests of Christ ahead of his own, the reason he cared for the welfare of others, the reason the gospel was his greatest cause was because he learned it from someone. He learned it from Paul. The question for us is from whom are we learning? Let's face it, our lives are being imprinted by others whether we realize it or not. We're all becoming like someone. The question is not if we are learning from others but what we are learning and who we're learning it from, right?¹²
- So who are you emulating? Who's your example? Which Christians are your models? A few verses later in **Philippians 3:17** Paul says *join with others in following my example...and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.* Paul's aim in sending Timothy is to send a model, a pattern that will rub off on the Philippians. Paul's purpose is to provide a clear example that younger and less-experienced Christians can model. Because "if they do not have such models, or if they are not encouraged to follow them, they are likely to follow poor or misleading or even dangerous examples"¹³
- So whom should we follow? Which Christians should be our models? Those who put the interests of Christ ahead of their own. Those who care more for the welfare of others, who serve others instead of themselves. Those who care about the gospel as their greatest cause are the ones we are to look up to and watch and follow and pattern our lives after.

Conclusion

- People believing that the sun was the center of the solar system and not the earth, that shift didn't happen overnight. It took almost 150 years and countless people like **Galileo** and **Tycho Brahe** and **Johannes Kepler** before people began to finally see the world around them differently. In the same way, the shift away from self as the center to Christ and his interests at the center can but doesn't necessarily happen overnight.
- What matters for us going forward as a church is the slow and continual accumulation of small choices that defy self so that Christ and his interests might be put first. Over time, even if it feels glacially slow, over time those small choices are enough to cause a revolution in Jesus name. May it be true of us. May it happen here.

¹¹ Carson, p. 69.

¹² Carson, p. 72.

¹³ Carson, p. 72.