

Sermon Series: A Love Letter for a Church in Peril
Today's Message: Paul's Messenger: A Brother
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Have you ever taken a risk? Sometimes it pays off, and sometimes it doesn't. E.g., a guy who invested much of his retirement on stock that was looking good, and then the market crashed and he lost a lot. E.g., I know of a guy who invested in real estate, and the property value went up and it worked out well for him. Other people take risks in sports. E.g., I recall a guy riding a bicycle with his feet strapped into the pedals, and his front tire hit a branch and he went flying on the bike and broke his hip. E.g., I have watched bikers in the Tour de France going down mountains at great speeds taking huge risks. It is amazing that people take risks just for the fun of it. E.g., the Tough Mudder race, where people experience electric shocks as they scramble low on the ground. E.g., my son Norwood, when he was in the sixth grade, and I going white water rafting on the Nantahala River in Tennessee and we're watching a video before and we're told one of the outcomes of this trip may well be our death! We are willing to go through risks for financial gain and the spirit of adventure, but how about taking risks for the furtherance of the gospel? Paul introduces us to one such person.

READ Philippians 2:25-30 (pp. 197-198)

CONTEXT: Paul just said he is going to send Timothy to him soon, and he commends Timothy. Timothy is someone who looks out for the interests of Jesus Christ, not his own. He is like a son to Paul, and complements him well in the ministry. But before he sends Timothy-- which he will once Paul knows his trial's outcome-- he will send Epaphroditus.

READ v 25. "Who is Epaphroditus? His name means 'lovely', as taken from Aphrodite. He brought gifts from the church in Philippi (4:18-19) and he was a close companion to Paul in the ministry." Paul is in prison, and in the ancient world prisoners were not taken care of their daily needs by the Roman government, but rather by their friends and relatives. The church in Philippi apparently gave Paul a financial gift delivered by Epaphroditus and probably friends. Paul was a minister in need, and they helped meet his needs. Have you ever helped a minister in need? E.g., I know of American Christians who have supported a girl in South America through Compassion International who was diagnosed with leukemia, and these Christians helped pay for her medical treatment so that she is now cancer free and in college!

READ vv 26-30. "In the service of the gospel Epaphroditus nearly lost his life, so Paul thinks he should be received by the Philippian church with great honor." Have you ever met someone who took a risk for the gospel, or even risked his or her life for the gospel? Always playing it safe has its appeal, but then nothing significant is accomplished for Christ's Kingdom, and we never really get a chance to see how faithful the Lord is! E.g., helping in serving people meals under the overpasses in New Orleans. E.g., helping next Saturday in Hollygrove with Trinity Christian Community will take a bit of a risk. Also sharing the gospel with a family member who is an ardent skeptic. As Paul says, when we do we are held in high honor!

“How should we follow the Philippian church’s example supporting the ministry of the gospel?” We should do so not only financially and taking risks to our security in doing so, but also taking risks-- when God leads us-- to our personal safety. Gordon D. Fee in his Philippians commentary (p. 284) states that taking risks is worth noting “in a culture [like our own] where taking risks is primarily related to ‘business ventures,’ rather than to genuinely personal risks related to one’s love for Christ and for his people.” As we approach Palm Sunday and Easter, let’s be in prayer about what personal risks we can take to glorify the Lord.