

Two Sons of Sacrifice

by Stewart Ruch

Bishop Stewart Ruch emphasizes the importance of understanding our sending by Jesus as a call to live a sacrificial life.

Duration: 27:09

Scripture: Isaiah 6:8, Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, John 20:21, Acts 1:8, Romans 10:14-15, Philippians 2:19

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on their experience of serving at the University of Illinois at Chicago and the challenges they faced in a diverse and cross-cultural environment. They express both joy and frustration in their journey, questioning how they ended up in this situation. The speaker emphasizes the importance of sending and supporting missionaries in global mission work, highlighting the example of Epaphroditus. They also mention the sacrifice and grit required in following Jesus, referencing the story of Timothy.

Transcript

This is Church of the Resurrection in Whedon, Illinois. This week's sermon is by Bishop Stuart Ruch and is part three of Free to Sacrifice, a series on Philippians. I was gathered around a huge bonfire many, many years ago in the upper peninsula of Michigan.

I was part of a larger Christian camp and I had students that I had been pastoring and reaching out to from the University of Illinois at Chicago and we were now doing kind of a special week together up in the UP of Michigan. To my right was a former gangbanger, Puerto Rican from Humboldt Park in Chicago who had just made a decision to become a follower of Jesus. Over here was a young African-American sister.

She had just that day for her first time in her life seen a live deer and was so afraid by that from her city experience that she was hoping to go home that day and I talked her out of it. It was new for her. Latina over here who will be leading us in beautiful worship in a few minutes.

After that time of beautiful worship, I didn't know it then, we would enter into a massive conflict, all of us. A kind of major bonfire argument that was fueled by significant cross-cultural differences, immaturities on all of our parts, and the challenge of working in an environment with people that were very new to the faith, people that were still choosing Jesus, and like I mentioned, profoundly different cultures. I would again and again in those five years of serving at the University of Illinois at Chicago in the city, scratch my head at

moments of incredible joy, these unbelievable breakthroughs in people's lives, as well as tedious, complicated conflicts.

I would scratch my head again and again and I would say to myself, how did I get here? How did I find myself here? My background would not naturally lead toward this situation and opportunity. I stayed in school. I went to a private college.

I grew up in Indiana. Here I am in one of the major cities of the world, profoundly multi-ethnic opportunities. I would scratch my head and I would say, how did I get here? Do you ever scratch your head and say to yourself, how did I get here? Dishes are stacked up at the sink, 9.30 at night.

How did I get here in this family with all these people that eat so much and then make so many dirty dishes? Hearts beating before you go in for your annual review with your boss. You're not sure how it's going to go. How did I get here in this job? You're a student perhaps looking and calculating that even if you never slept until Christmas break, you could not get all the work done that's ahead of you.

How did I get here? What am I doing here with all this pressure and work? Do you ever scratch your head and wonder that how did I get here? When I asked that question in those days after that bonfire, I could confidently say in answer to that question, Jesus sent me here. That's how I got here. I was clear on that.

I wasn't clear about a lot of things, but I was clear on that. Jesus sent me here. He sent me to sacrifice my energy, sacrifice my hours, sacrifice the best that I had.

He sent me here to sacrifice. It is so important in the sacrificial Jesus life that every follower of Jesus is called to live, that you are clear how you got there. That you are clear that Jesus has sent you.

Jesus has called you. Jesus has asked you to come into a certain place, a job, a family situation, a neighborhood, a roommate dynamic, a classroom. You've been called there by Jesus.

This was not of your own doing. You're not actually running your own life. We have two profiles in sending, two profiles in sacrifice, and these beautiful little vignettes around a person named Timothy and a person named Epaphroditus.

I titled the sermon originally Two Sons of Sacrifice. I changed that title, Sent to Sacrifice, because as we're teaching about the call of the sacrificial life, I want you to understand that the sacrificial life most often starts with a sending. That the way that the sacrificial life actually works out and the way that it actually gets catalyzed and what it's connected to, the sacrificial life is connected to Jesus sending you.

I hope this will be clear. I hope this will be concrete as you're called to live the sacrificial life in Jesus. I hope, I hope in this Bible time you'll become freer to sacrifice.

I hope if you're not a believer yet, you'll go, okay, wow, this is about sacrificing your life? That's what followers of Jesus do? If you walk away as a not yet believer, that's exactly what I'm talking about, and I hope it gets clear. Okay, first question we've already touched on. Key question, where has Jesus sent you to sacrifice? Where is Jesus sending you, preparing you to sacrifice? First key question.

Second question, are you willing to get gritty? And gritty could be a kind of synonym for sacrifice. I just say it so much, these sermons, that I needed another word. Maybe something a little more vivid.

Are you willing to get gritty? You can get gritty Timothy. You can get gritty Epaphroditus. They were gritty in two different ways.

I don't want you to think that sending always has to do with being sent to a different location, although it might. But I do want you to understand that to live the way of Jesus is to live the way of him who was sent, our Lord himself, and to live as one who is sent, you in your life. Where has Jesus sent you? Look with me, Philippians 2, you guys, verse 19, I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy.

Okay, when we study the Bible, it's like throwing a rock in a pond, and you start where the rock hits, which is the text we have right here, Philippians 2. Okay, so that's our rock, okay? But then you know, ripples go out. So when you study the Bible, you want to let your ripples go out. You want to understand what are the larger contextual ripples that are going out to understand what's happening within this passage.

So there's some things that are happening. First of all, one of the first ripples we get is that this is actually travel plans. This is Paul writing a letter.

He's writing a letter to a church that, by the way, he started because he was sent there. He didn't send himself to Philippi. He didn't say, you know what, I'm going to go to Philippi.

I mean, you could say that and be in accordance with God's will, but in this case, it was radical. He was going somewhere else, and he had a vision. He had like a waking dream where a man from Macedonia, where Philippi is located, came and said, come here and help us.

When Paul got into all kinds of challenges in Philippi and a lot of joys, he could look back and say, well, I know that I'm supposed to be here because Jesus sent me through that crazy man in that Macedonian vision moment. So this letter actually comes out of one who's been sent. That's like the genesis of this letter.

But here we're dealing with travel plans. But Paul says, even dealing with travel plans, I hope in the Lord to send Timothy. For Paul, even travel plans can have a gospel center.

This guy is crazy. I hope you read enough of Paul for him to bother you. I hope you've read enough of Paul and taken him seriously enough for him to irk you.

You should be bothered by Paul at times. I mean, is he just so spiritual? I can't just work out where Timothy is going in power. I have to say, in the Lord.

Is he just one of those overly spiritualized persons? Yes. If spiritualized means packed with the Holy Spirit, which is the meaning of the word in the New Testament, spiritual is for the spirit, a spirit person. He is a full of the spirit person who is always thinking about the gospel.

What's the gospel? The gospel is the unbelievable news that Jesus has been sent to earth by the Father to die, resurrect, to save us from our sins so we can be used and be sent to others. That's the gospel. Jesus died and was resurrected, sent to earth by the Father to save us from our sins.

And Paul is bringing up the gospel in travel plans. I hope in the Lord Jesus to send. Travel plans.

Okay, next ripple out. Send. Words used four times.

Look for repeated words when you're doing your Bible study because it helps us to get an idea of what's important to the writer. He uses the word send four times. Another layer out.

Well, we know that send is a really important word for those who follow Jesus in his way. As a matter of fact, one of the very first things Jesus said after he resurrected, one of the very first words that came out of his mouth, of all the words he could have said after he resurrected, he met with his followers. He was resurrected.

He looks at them in John chapter 20, verse 21, and he says, As the Father has sent me, so send. Emphasis on send. So send I you.

So send. That word there, send, in John 20, 21, is the exact same word here. I hope in the Lord to send Timothy.

I have found it necessary to send you Epaphroditus. Where has God sent you? The first thing you must be clear on is that being sent is a gift. Gifts and grace are synonymous in the New Testament.

It's a grace. To be sent is a gift. Here's why.

You can't, or at least you shouldn't, give yourself a gift. Gifts come from others. They're initiated from someone else who has a love, a care, a concern for you.

That's the nature of a grace. That's the nature of a gift. You don't send yourselves.

Jesus sends you, for he himself was sent by the Father. When you are sent, you are sent with Jesus and from Jesus, who himself is a sent one. Indeed, at the very heart of the character of who God is, is that he is a sending God who sends his Son to this earth.

His Son then sends those who would follow him to this earth for the purpose of sacrificing their lives as Jesus himself sacrificed his life. The cross is so many things, but one thing it is, be certain, it is a majestic picture of the God who sends to rescue. It's a majestic picture of the God who sends his own Son to rescue.

So sending is really important in understanding what it means to live a gospel life, a kingdom life. You are those who have been sent by him who was sent by the Father. It's a gift.

It's a grace. You don't give a gift to yourself. I mean, unless you get to a pathetic place in your marriage.

This is happening to Catherine and me more and more, where it's like, well, you know, it's our anniversary. I'd kind of like this. You'd kind of like that.

Just get it for yourself and just call it a gift. It's just pathetic, isn't it? Now, Catherine's going to say that didn't happen this anniversary. No, it probably didn't.

I'm not sure we even gave each other a gift this anniversary. But it's pathetic to give yourself a gift. When you're in that position of giving yourself a gift, you have to stop back and go, how did I get here? Right? No, no, no, no, no.

Being sent is a gift from Jesus. It's a grace. This is why this is important.

If you have a heart to sacrifice, here's where your temptation will be. To think that in your sacrificial life as a teacher or a mom or a dad, a celibate, single, whatever it might be, that you're winning with God. You're winning with God.

You'll sacrifice. You'll sacrifice as long as you can keep a sense of, I'm winning with God. I'm actually impressing God.

We don't sacrifice to win with God. We sacrifice to be on the way with God, for he is a sending God. We don't sacrifice to win with God.

If you get there, you can easily slip into what's called works righteousness. You're trying to earn your place with God. He knows you way too well for that.

He knows that some of those sacrifices that you made were driven by a selfishness to be recognized as a highly sacrificial person. He knows that. He knows how complex the human heart is and how dark it can be.

You will never win your way with God through a profoundly sacrificial life. Oh, it's so much better. You will enter into the way with God.

As the Father has sent me, so send I you. You've been sent in to sacrifice to live with Jesus, to be with Jesus. That's the gift of living a sacrificial life.

It's Jesus. It starts with Jesus. It ends with Jesus.

Back to my first sermon a few weeks ago, Jesus always, to live Christ, to die, to sacrifice, gain. That's what Paul's thinking about. That's how we live lives of free sacrifice.

Where has Jesus sent you? To live a sacrificial life. Are you clear on that? You may need to discern your sending. You may need help from other followers of Jesus to discern your sending.

Maybe you're not clear you've been sent. Maybe you're not sure that where you are right now is the place where you've been sent. Maybe there's a sending coming and you need discernment about where you're being sent from the Lord Jesus.

Be assured this is the heart of God, the heart of the character of God. He will bring you through the church, through the Bible, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, clarity about being sent. The Christian life is not just circumstantial.

You don't just live a circumstantial life where you move from one circumstance to another. You don't live a status quo life. That doesn't say you don't live a life of peace or a life of in the Lord being settled in the Lord, but you live a life of being sent.

Oh yes, the Lord saves us, but he also sends us. Here's the challenge when we live the life of being sent to sacrifice is that we can lose our love. We can lose our love for those to whom we've been called.

You know what Paul says earlier in the passages that we read? Do all things without grumbling or disputing that you may be blameless and innocent. What's happening? What happens is that we grumble and we dispute. We lose our love for those that we're called to.

If losing your love is too intense, we lose our like. I'm not saying you don't love your kids anymore, but you may not like them very much right now, but you're called to them. You may not like your students if you're a teacher very much right now.

You may not like your teacher very much if you're a student right now. You may actually have lost your like. You may have lost your love.

You may have forgotten that the reason that you're here is because Jesus has sent you and he's calling you to an ever-renewing call to yet again love those you're sent to, serve those you're sent to. Don't, Paul is saying implicitly, not explicitly, don't lose your love. Complaining is very likely a sign that you're losing your love.

You've lost your sending context. You think you're just living circumstantially and your circumstances are really hard. Well, they may be really hard, but the sending understanding will help you zoom out to go, now this is a Jesus thing.

This was a Jesus call. I'm in this marriage called by Jesus. I've given you this quote before.

I'm going to give you it again because I found it so important. It comes from one of the great, great Christian thinkers, Augustine of Hippo, African bishop. He says this about the life of sacrifice.

The greater one's love is, the easier the work. The greater one's love is, the greater your capacity to live in Jesus who sent you to begin with, the easier the work. I know that many of you live really difficult, sacrificial lives.

If you're not living one now, you're going to at some point. It's going to come. And you will hit points where you will think, I cannot do this anymore.

I can't work at this job anymore, though Jesus has called me. I can't stay in this country anymore, though Jesus has called me. I can't handle this family situation, even though Jesus has called me.

I know he's called me. Your choice in those points is to increase your love for the gift of Jesus. Are you willing to get gritty? Sending is, by its very nature, biblically understanding it, incarnational.

We're going to do a four-week series, by the way, on the incarnation during Advent. I'm very excited about an exploration of John chapter 1 together, coming soon. But incarnation is necessarily gritty.

Our Lord, Jesus, is fully human. Skin, organs, hair, a brain. In ancient Near East first century life, very gritty.

He got tired. He was hungry. It was gritty living.

That is the heart of being sent. You're not sent into a theoretically amazing love situation where you see yourself as this unbelievably impressive icon of sacrifice. You're sent into grit, which is often very daily, even hourly.

Are you willing to get gritty? There's a Timothy gritty. I'm from Rome to Philippi. But it is time in Rome where Paul's in prison.

Here's what's happening. We don't know all the details, but we know what happened for ancient Near Eastern prisoners. There were no meals provided for you.

You would starve, were there not those who would care for you. There was no medical care. Prison was an absolute and utter devastation, unless someone was sent to care for you, as Timothy had been.

What is Timothy primarily doing? He's probably not primarily preaching the gospel on the street corners of Rome at this point, or planting a church. He is primarily doing what? Cooking meals and washing dishes. Do you ever just wonder, like, why so many meals in life? If you don't wonder that, you don't cook for people.

So many meals. I mean, like, the way we've handled it at the Ruck House is we just all hate lunch. If you just, like, hate lunch, at least you, like, have only two to worry about.

Breakfast, lovely, begins the day. Dinner, kind of a romance with dinner, it's wonderful. But lunch, we hate lunch.

You starve at our house. I mean, like, we're looking for food under the table. It's not true.

I'm going to get so much trouble with Catherine. I should have preached that at the 830, not the 1030. So many meals.

So many dishes. That's what Timothy is doing. There's a kind of domestic grittiness to Timothy's call.

Paul calls him my son. There's like this familial relationship where, like a son, he is caring for his spiritual father. He's picking up the vomit after his spiritual father is sick because of the conditions in the prison.

We can only assume. There's a gritty sending that so many of us are called to, and we think that's just life. That's just circumstances.

That's just a difficulty. No, that could be the gospel if you're sent to it. That's the gospel work of a mother or a father or a brother or a sister or someone caring for an ancient parent.

Kath and I had a neighborhood mystery solved this week. We'd be up early on our front porch, and every morning around 6, 15 a.m., we'd see one of our neighbors pull into his driveway, pull in after being gone. And we'd say, where has he been? He doesn't have a night shift.

Where has he been all night? We don't know. And this guy was walking to my car, and that neighbor was across the street, and I just heard that his mom had passed. And I said, hey, I just heard your mom passed.

I'm so sorry. He never walks across the street. He walked across the street.

He stood right in front of me. I said, yeah. Last couple of days of my mom's life, she hated to sleep by herself in her house.

So I'd go over there every night, sleep in the house with her, come here early in the morning, shower, and then go to work. It's gritty. It's Timothy's sacrifice.

He was called into that. Sermon to his mom. Be ennobled.

Be empowered, if you recall, to Timothy Grit. Sacrifice. Remember, you're sent.

Epaphroditus Grit. There's a different feel to Epaphroditus. Timothy's, clearly, just his one service after another.

Epaphroditus is not called son, interestingly enough, although perhaps Paul would have viewed him as such, but he calls him brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier. And he says, and you're Philippi's messenger and minister to my need. We learned that he was ill, near to death, verse 27.

Paul says, so receive Epaphroditus in the Lord with all joy and honor such men. For he only died for the work of Christ, seeking, risking his life to complete what was lacking in service to me. This kind of sending sacrificial grit is one in which there is higher risk, higher physical risk, very likely.

To even travel in the ancient Near East was a high risk proposition. You didn't get in a plane, land in Rome, and make your way to the prison through an Uber. You didn't do that, right? High risk from bandits.

High risk from disease. Perhaps he had a disease amongst the many diseases that would have proliferated through an ancient Near Eastern prison. This Epaphroditus grit had to do with risking his life on behalf of the church who sent him.

They couldn't all go, Philippi couldn't all go to be with Paul, so they raised someone up from within them, and they sent him on their behalf. He represented Philippi to Paul. And how much that deeply meant to Paul, for he loved Philippi so deeply.

Note, by the way, I can't do much on this, the supernatural. God has mercy, verse 27, on Epaphroditus in his illness. We don't get more detail.

Some commentators wonder, was there a laying on of hands? Was there a word of healing, a ministry of healing? We don't know exactly how Epaphroditus was healed, but we know that Paul viewed it as supernatural. That when we are sent, and sent in the high risk situations, as well as Timothy grit situations, the presence of the supernatural, the presence of the power of Jesus, who himself has been sent, and is there with us in our sending, is there. But indeed in Epaphroditus, we see somebody who's gone cross culturally from his own city to another city.

He's gone with high risk. Let's be clear that the work of global mission is still the work of the church. That for so long, global missionaries were perhaps wrongly idolized in some ways within local churches.

But let me be assuring to you that we no longer have that danger or fear. We have perhaps forgotten the urgency of global mission. And that there are people who are called on our behalf, when we can't go, to go places we will never go.

Because they're gritty Epaphroditus callings. They're called to go cross culturally. They're called to go into great risk and physical risk.

I remember asking a long-term global missionary who was doing a sabbatical here at resurrection. He's getting ready to prepare to go back to his home country. Well, leaving his home country, going to the country.

He's been called to a mission. And I said to him, how are you feeling about it? He said, I wake up every night at 4 a.m. terrified. That's how I feel.

I wake up every night at 4 a.m. terrified. Honor such men. Honor such women.

And we do. And we're very committed at resurrection to the work of global mission, short-term, long-term, partnership. But to those who go on our behalf, Epaphroditus did.

So we have to be able to say both things in one sermon. Let's be of the Timothy grit that most of us are called to. But not at the exclusion of the Epaphroditus grit.

We just sent out from our lovely church community, Scott and Marissa Cunningham to go to Madison, Wisconsin. I wish you could have seen their faces when Calvin spent the evening with them two nights before they were to leave. Now, they were resolute, knowing they were, they knew they were called.

But they were very sobered. Two young boys, brand new city, no guarantee of a financial future. People just don't do stuff like that unless they're sent by Jesus, who was sent by the Father.

We asked Scott, Marissa, what else can we do for you guys? How else can we serve you? We're so blessed that you're going on our behalf to Madison. Scott just said, man, I just want res folk there. We just need res folk on this team.

So I'm just bringing that to you as one application of this sermon. I'm asking those of you who may be sent by Jesus to go to Madison, to go to Madison, Wisconsin. There may be some of you who are being stirred to an almost cultural, perhaps to Madison.

How did you get here? What are you doing? Your answer can be clear and resolute and confident. I'm here because Jesus has sent me to sacrifice my life. I'm sacrificing like a Timothy.

I'm sacrificing like an Epaphroditus. As the Father has sent me, Jesus said, so send I you. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

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