

## PHILEMON

### Introduction - 2023

The book of Philemon is the 57th book in the English bible. It has but one chapter containing 25 verses and 430 words, all of which we will read this morning. It is affectionately known as "Paul's Prison Postcard."

Warren Wiersbe, in his commentary on Philemon, calls the book, **"The Tale of Two Cities."** Rome... and Colosse. Here is why...

**Something amazing and wonderful was happening in the City of Rome**, where Paul is a prisoner because of his faith...

- Even though he is in prison, people are being saved under Paul's ministry.
- Even under the threat of death, people are visiting Paul and bringing and receiving encouragement...
- Churches are being started all over the region and surrounding countries by folks who are being led to Christ by this fellow in chains named Paul.
- One of the people who gets saved is a wanted criminal named Onesimus... He is a professed thief, and He has run away from a slave debt...
  - To make matters even worse, He has become one of Paul's closest helpers. BUT, He confesses to Paul that he has stolen from his former employer and has no way of paying back the debt. IF he returns to his former employer - the man he stole from, he will most surely be put to death, and he knows he deserves it too. He is in the dilemma of his life, wanting to do right now that he is a Christian, but of course NOT wanting to die either. He tells Paul all of this with little hope of a reconcilable solution...
  - **MAKING MATTERS EVEN WORSE**, Paul tells Onesimus - Oh Man!, You stole from my friend, Philemon! What were the odds that this Slave on the Lam, would confess his sin to the one person in all of Rome who knew his former employer and victim? Now, Paul has a dilemma too!

**Back in Colosse, Something amazing and wonderful was happening** as well. A house-Church was meeting in the home of a man named Philemon. He and his beloved wife, Apphia AND his son, Archippus were ministering to people in the City...

- They were helping the helpless...
- They were feeding the hungry...
- They had opened their home for Church services & Bible studies.
- They had a guest room that visiting Pastors and Missionaries could use...
- And of course, Satan had fought them, bringing tough problems and struggles into their home - He always does, doesn't he?
- One of the tragedies they suffered was that an employee of theirs had stolen a bunch of things and had taken off with it.

- Philemon had placed the employees name on a wanted list...
- Anybody coming into contact with this criminal, Onesimus, was required to notify the Roman Government and have him arrested - dead or alive. It didn't matter.
- Now, Philemon is about to receive a postcard from his good friend, the very same person who had witnessed to him and had led him to the Lord...
  - Dear Philemon, please go easy on this thief...

We will deal with the subject of Bible Days Slavery, but it is estimated that there were 60 million slaves in Paul's day scattered through the Roman Empire.

- An uneducated slave like Onesimus would be sold for 500 days worth of pay. That's a lot of money!
- You then would have to house, feed and equip that slave.
- The point is this - Philemon had lost a lot when Onesimus took off - Not taking into account whatever it was that he stole.

IF WE ARE CAREFUL students of God's Word...

- We too will realize something strangely familiar with this postcard from prison...
- Martin Luther, who loved this little letter, wrote this:
  - We are all Onesimus!
  - We too owed a debt that we could not pay...
  - We too were on God's "wanted list."
  - We too were running from our sin, hiding out in the world hoping against hope that we would not be hauled before the Judge of all Judges for our sins...
- And then..... Then we made a new friend...
  - His name is Jesus...
  - It turns out that we owed His Father a lot! MORE than we could pay...
  - Jesus wrote a letter for us asking His Father to forgive our debt...
  - Promising, just like Paul will in his postcard from prison to pay all that we owed...

Let's read Paul's Postcard from Prison....

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### **Paul's Prayer of Thanksgiving V1-7**

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, (**NOT the Roman Gov...**)

- **SMITH** – This is why and HOW Paul could rejoice in his sufferings, he was suffering for the Lord. The Romans could not hold him, but, the Lord was using him there!

1b ...and Timothy *our* brother, To Philemon *our* beloved *friend* and fellow laborer, 2 to the beloved Apphia, **(Probably His wife)** Archippus *our* fellow soldier, **(Probably his Son)** and to the church in your house:

- When you look back through the Youtube and FB recordings of our ministry, you will recognize five different houses that we met in over the years...
  - The Bauer's, The Gardiner's, The Behrend's, The Brown's, and the Coleman's. In our earlier years we met in several homes that you will have to ask the Skelly's and the Patrick's whose homes we met in. Probably theirs!

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- CCSV, Why Grace before peace?

4 I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers,

- Paul prayed non-stop for the people in his ministry circle.
- This is what I want for us too CCSV. It is why I am bugging you all to get in the online directory – SO you can be prayed for by one another. The little picture will help others to get to know you too.

### **PAUL IS GRATEFUL...**

5 hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints, 6 that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

- Hmm... It might be that Paul is setting the tone for something...

7 For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.

- ***Oh, Philemon's heart must have swelled with the precious beginning of the little note from his beloved father in the faith!***

## Paul's Petition for Onesimus V8-16

Therefore, *(What do we know about Paul's "therefore's?")* though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, *(IE, I COULD tell you what to do...)* **9** yet **for love's sake** I rather appeal to you—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ— *(What do we know about Paul's dashes?)* **Emotion!**

- It is always a red flag warning when leaders- of any kind, become bullies.
  - Chuck Smith always used City Hall as the example of this... You have once kind-hearted civil servants, given the authority to hold your building permit back, and then they become civic center bullies.
- You could just sense, feel, and hear the joy in their voices as they say things like, "NOPE!" you cannot put a church there. You are 1 ½ parking spaces short. I'm NOT making this up. THE POINT...
  - Paul was not a bully. NO PASTOR should be a bully. When you come across a Pastor who is a bully... Pray about IF you should stay and wait for him to be humbled.
    - **SO, PAUL MAKES AN APPEAL...**

**10** I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, *(G3685; profitable)* whom I have begotten *(Spiritually)* while in my chains, **11** who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable *(useful)* to you and to me.

- What a glorious rehabilitation! A runaway thief, once wanted dead or alive, is now a minister for the gospel of Jesus Christ!
  - AND a **USEFUL minister** at that!

### THEN THIS HAPPENED

**12** I am sending him back. *(WHAT!?!?)* You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, **13** whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel. **14** But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary.

- What a great Pastor Paul was... He sets Philemon up to succeed by being WILLING to forgive and accept Onesimus back as a brother, and to be blessed by God for doing so.
  - I want this for you all too!

15 For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, 16 no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

***THIS is going to be one-tough Parole hearing!!!***

***BUT Beloved, Paul has already had his own Parole hearing... He is appealing on behalf of grace and mercy from the very heart of Jesus Christ...***

***Paul is suggesting to Philemon, that he had been wronged in order that things would be made right.***

- ***To say that that is a tough sale is an understatement...***
  - ***But, Beloved... How many torn relationships in YOUR life (And in MY life) might be made right if WE TOO could accept back - Loved ones, Family members, or friends who have wronged us and have been "written out" of our hearts?***
- ***COULD YOU, like Paul is asking Philemon, be willing to forgive for the sake of heaven a wrong that was done to you or to your family? CORRECT ANSWER IS YES!***

**In V17-25 - The Apostle makes a promise to payback Philemon**

17 If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me.

- NLT - So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.
  - Could you invite your archenemy to stay in your guest room?
    - Would you lock their door from the outside?

**PUT IT ON MY TAB**

18 But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account.

- **IF Jesus is your Savior, HE has made this statement to His Father... about, YOU!**

**BTW...**

19 I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. ***(IE, I raise my right hand...)*** I will repay—**not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides.**

## THANKING YOU IN ADVANCE

20 Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord. 21 Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

22 But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.

**Paul makes it clear to Philemon that a "Face to Face" meeting is going to happen in the future.**

- **Friends, you, and I have one of those meetings coming too someday.**
  - **Paul was letting Philemon know that that meeting was coming.... That Philemon had the chance to glory in his benevolence to Onesimus...**
- **Or to be ashamed at Paul's arrival at NOT having grace for another man – Grace that HE had already experienced from God.**
  - **You and I have that same choice to make, Don't we?**
- **Do we give those who have wronged us Grace? or Grief?**

## Final Greeting

23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, 24 as do Mark, **(Who knew a little about being forgiven...)** Aristarchus, Demas, **(Who would eventually deny the faith)** Luke, my fellow laborers.

25 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Paul answers the tough questions for us in this last line of his Postcard....  
**Grace!**

**NEXT WEEK – HEBREWS!**