

"Runaway Slaves"

Philemon

Introduction: Tonight, I want to share a message with you from the Letter of Philemon. This is a letter that Paul wrote to one of his fellow servants and if we look closely at the letter we see a most beautiful picture.

As we go through our Christian walk we must always keep in mind that the people we meet as we walk in the will of God are not chance meetings they are Divine appointments which God arranges for a purpose. Let me show you some verses that will support this.

Proverbs 16:9

⁹A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.

Proverbs 19:21

²¹There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.

Ruth 2:1-3

¹And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz.

²And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.

*³And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: **and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz**, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.*

Ruth and Naomi had come back to Bethlehem after the famine was over and Ruth decided to go and see if she could find a field to glean in and it just so happened she ended up in a field that belonged to Boaz who would become her husband and was the relative of her late father-in-law. This was Divine direction it was not by chance nor was it luck. God had directed her steps and she did not even know it was Divine direction.

Esther 4:10-14

¹⁰ Again Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai;

¹¹ All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or women, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days.

¹² And they told to Mordecai Esther's words.

¹³ Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews.

¹⁴ For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

The same things happen in our lives, but the sad part is that sometimes we are so focused upon our will that we completely miss the Divine appointment that God has arranged for our lives. You see what happens is that when something occurs that is unexpected or that sets us back in some way we are so wrapped up in ourselves that we become angry that maybe we have to spend some extra money or that we have been inconvenienced because we have to take time out of our schedules to go somewhere for an appointment that we did not plan on. May I suggest to you that God has rearranged our schedules because he had a Divine appointment for us?

We all get discouraged and frustrated when this happens but I certainly hope that the message today will help you to see how God brings us in contact with people in some of the strangest places because He has arranged a special meeting for us.

I. The Person (:1)

Background: The letter we are about look at was written by the Apostle Paul while he was in prison in Rome. The letter is written to one of Paul's fellow servants by the name of Philemon.

Notice Philemon 1:1

¹Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer,

From this verse I can see that Philemon was close to Paul and was at the same time a fellow laborer with Paul. Philemon apparently was a man who was active for God and he exercised his spiritual gifts.

I would like to suggest that he was a wealthy man also and I say this because he owned slaves.

II. The Praise (:4-7)

Notice Philemon 1:4 - Paul prayed for Philemon and thanked God for him.

Notice Philemon 1:5-6 - Here we see the reputation of Philemon. He was a man of love and faith that was shown toward the Lord and the other believers.

"Communication" means "sharing" and so he was a man that seemed to share his faith and his personal life style was something that complimented the faith that he shared.

Notice Philemon 1:7 - His faith, testimony, and love brought great joy to Paul and the other saints that knew him. He sounded like a man that would have been a real blessing to any church.

Application:

When I read this I cannot help but ask what would someone like Paul write about me if he were writing a letter? What would they say about your faith, lifestyle, and love for the other believers if they wrote concerning you? Let me remind you that each of us is writing a letter with our lives every day and everyone we encounter is reading what we write.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John
Are read by more than a few,
But the one that is most read and commented on
Is the gospel according to you.

You are writing a gospel, a chapter each day
By the things that you do and the words that you say,
Men read what you write, whether faithless or true,
Say, what is the gospel according to you'

Do men read His truth and His love in your life,
Or has yours been too full of malice and strife'

Does your life speak of evil, or does it ring true'
Say, what is the gospel according to you'

Arthur McPhee

III. The Purpose (:8-17)

Now we get into the purpose and the meat of the letter.

a. Paul's Approach

Notice Philemon 1:8

The word "enjoin" means "command" and "convenient" means "proper or required". So Paul is telling Philemon here that he considered using his authority as an apostle to command Philemon to do the right or the proper thing.

Notice Philemon 1:9

But instead Paul chose to address Philemon with love from one brother to another. Paul was getting up in years and as I said he was in prison at this time.

Application:

What an example Paul gives to us here. There may be times when we can use the position that God has given us in this life to get others to do the right thing but there are times the position needs to be set aside and love needs to lead us in the matter. We have a far greater impact upon people who watch us when we are controlled by love and not power.

b. Paul's Request

Notice Philemon 1:10

Here we are introduced to a man by the name of Onesimus. He was at one time the slave of Philemon. But he had run away. Here in this verse Paul introduces him as his son that he had begotten in his bonds. What does he mean? Paul had won this man to the Lord while he was in prison in Rome.

Now, that makes me ask, "What was Onesimus doing in the prison where Paul was?" Let me give you something to consider. Onesimus was a runaway slave which tells us he most likely was somewhat on the wild side. There is a very good possibility that he the process of

sowing his wild oats he landed in jail and it just happened to be that he landed in the part of the jail where Paul was. While he was chained up there he was exposed to the Gospel on a daily basis and eventually he came to put his faith in Jesus and was saved.

As time went on he became close to Paul and actually became very useful to him.

Notice Philemon 1:11

Here is some insight. He was unprofitable to Philemon which tells us that he was hard to deal with but now he has become a great help to Paul and Paul tells Philemon that he will now be helpful to him. That is the change that Paul has seen in the life of Onesimus. That is living proof of 2 Corinthians 5:17.

2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁷Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Onesimus was now a different person because he was now in Christ.

Notice Philemon 1:12

Here we see that Paul had sent him back to Philemon and the request was for Philemon to receive him. Let me just say what a difference Christ has made in the life of Onesimus. There was no forcing him to go back to Philemon. Paul just simply sent him on his way and placed in his hand this letter that we are studying.

Notice Philemon 1:13

Paul desired to keep Onesimus with him so that he could minister unto Paul. We are not sure what he did for Paul but whatever it was Paul was truly comforted by it. Let me give you some thoughts as to what he may have done.

1. **Prayed**
2. **Read**
3. **Provided**

He must have finished his time if he was in prison and he even chose to stay with Paul until Paul sent him back. Why would he stay with Paul? I say that he had a desire to learn and that also is a result of his conversion.

Notice Philemon 1:14

Paul would not allow Onesimus to stay with him without the permission of Philemon. He could have stated that he needed to stay because of necessity meaning that Paul really needed him but Paul would not do that. If Onesimus came back Paul wanted it to be because Philemon willingly allowed him to return and to minister to Paul's needs.

Notice Philemon 1:15

Here is a remarkably interesting verse. Paul is saying to Philemon that possibly all of this happened so that Onesimus would be saved and then return to serve Philemon for the rest of his life.

Notice Philemon 1:16

Paul desired for Philemon to receive him no longer just as a slave but as a brother in the Lord.

Notice Philemon 1:17

The word "receive" here means "to take into one's home with the idea of showing kindness".

So, the purpose of Paul writing this letter was to remind Philemon of his responsibility to show forgiveness to Onesimus and to treat him as Christ would treat him.

Lessons from Paul's words:

1. What looks like a tragedy is often a blessing.

Let's say that Onesimus would have been your biological son. Let's say that you have been praying for him to come to Christ. One day he runs away from you and your control and after some time passes word comes back to you that he has been arrested and is now in jail. How would you feel? You would feel like I would and you would question where God was in all of this, but from this letter we can see that for Onesimus jail was a good thing because it was there that he was introduced to Christ. Most likely this was a low point in the life of Onesimus as it would be with anyone who was arrested and thrown into jail. But we must understand that as we pray for our loved ones to get saved that sometimes they need to hit the bottom before they will begin to look up to God.

One of the hardest prayers to pray for a loved one that is caught up in the world is that God would do whatever it takes to reach them with the Gospel and bring them to Jesus Christ.

Maybe your loved one has "runaway" in the sense that they will not listen to you and they seem to have no concern at all for God. If you are praying for them understand that if you are walking in fellowship with Jesus, God hears your prayers. We must also understand that He works in ways that we do not understand.

Isaiah 55:8

⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

2. Don't miss the opportunities to share the Gospel with runaway slaves.

You are probably thinking that you do not know any runaway slaves but I say that we encounter them every day. You see, anyone who is not saved is a slave to sin and if we watch those people we can clearly see that they are doing all they can to escape the effects of the sin in their lives. They are so busy and so involved in activities and while they do not know it they are trying to satisfy an inward desire that only Jesus can fill. So every day we encounter people that are the same as Onesimus.

But the problem is that there are many times that we do our best to stay away from these people that are enslaved to sin. Maybe they are addicted to some substance or maybe they have made choices that have destroyed their families and so we look down upon these people when we should be looking at them through the eyes of Jesus. We need to understand as I said in the beginning that the people we meet in our lives are Divine appointments and when we see them in this way it completely changes our view of those that God brings into our lives.