

# Philemon (Reissue)

August 7, 2022

Welcome to the Beamsville Church of Christ Online Ministry Services are presented on YouTube, Facebook and our website. One week following recording this week's videos pulled from our archives. The sermon is called Philemon and it was originally released September 27th, 2020. Thank you to Dave, Kristin, and Don for being part of the video. The scripture reading is Philemon one 3 to 6. Grace and peace to you from God, our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I always think, my God, as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ.

## Welcome & Prayer

Welcome to everyone. It's good to have you together with us, to worship God and before we begin, I have a brief reading from Psalms eight one that is familiar to us, but this time of seasonal change and harvest and colors changing and the world around us, we appreciate the beauty, O Lord, our Lord. How majestic is your name in all the earth you've set your glory above the heavens. From the lips of children and infants, you have ordained praise because your enemies to silence the foe and the Avenger. When I consider your heavens the works of your fingers, the moon and the stars which have set in place. What is man that you are mindful of him? The son of man that you care for him. You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands. You put everything under his feet, all flocks and herds and beasts of the fields and birds of the air and fish of the sea. All that swim. The paths of the seas. Oh, Lord. Our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth? Let's pray now.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for all of your blessings. You have indeed blessed us in so many ways. We bring before you those names of our church family and those that we know that are suffering and grieving, those that are healing, those that need your comfort and assurance continue to surround us all with your love and your grace. Help us to realize your presence that surrounds us in everything around us. May we be merciful and forgiving, full of grace, as you have shown us how to be through your son, strengthen us to serve. Accept our worship and praise. In Jesus name, we pray, Amen.

## Communion

Good morning and thank you, Don, for that message. It's always good to know that we're all welcome. And I love that Don always reminds us that we're all welcome. I was here yesterday setting up for the service, and when I arrived, Johnny was out cutting the grass, quietly doing his thing. And when I came inside, I was starting to listen to some of the songs to make sure that they would play. And he came to the door and he said, I thought I heard a little a little something. I thought I'd come over and investigate. So it was lovely to see him here. And it's a blessing that we have people that do things behind the scenes that we're not aware of and how much love they have for our church.

And as the spirit usually does, Spirit nudged me to think about gardening and water and how that ties into our Christian life. I'm not sure if you know, but Water's mentioned a total of 722 times in the Bible and in the Bible. It doesn't take very long for us to start hearing about water, because right away in

Genesis one, verse two, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

And we know that water is such an essential component of life. And it was created on the very first day and at the end of the Bible, water is mentioned again in Revelations and it's almost the last words of the Bible in Revelations 22 and 17, the spirit and the bride say Come and let everyone who hears say Come and let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift. Water flows through the Scripture, and this reminds us of its importance, both spiritually and physically. 70 to 75% of the Earth's surface is covered with water. Roughly 70% of an adult's body is made up of water, and about 85% of the adult brain is made up of water. Water is essential to life, and all living things need water to survive. So why, as God's children do we sometimes take this gift for granted? Jesus is the source of our living water, and he sends an invitation to all who would thirst. This week I've had this song running through my mind just about every day, and I'd like you to listen to the words. We're going to hear the words after I'm finished speaking and praying. But I'm going to read the words to you now. It's called O Come to the Altar. We take communion to remember his body broken for us and his blood shed for us. We remember that water and blood poured from Jesus. Wounds. Wounds? When he was crucified. Water is given to us by our Lord Almighty. Let us remember this and honor His blessings daily. I'm going to pray for the bread and the fruit of the vine together at the same time. And afterwards, I'm going to invite you to meditate on the words of the song. O Come to the altar after we have it up on the screen. If you would pray with me.

Dear Father, thank you for meeting us here where we are. Thank you for coming to us. When we forget to come to you, help us to see you and to know you are there. When we come to the end of ourselves, help us to open our hearts to you. Help us to be humble to your great power. We ask that you bless us as we take the bread and the juice, the symbols of Christ, death for us on the cross. We come to you and all your love and grace and Jesus name. We pray. Amen.

## Sermon

Good morning, everyone. All right. Thank you very much for being with us. We're praying for everyone's health, good health, mentally, physically and spiritually. We are gathering together to proclaim the word of God. And we live in a society that right now is going through some difficult times, a world that's going through some difficult times. And if you're hearing this 50 years from now, somebody gets hold of this message. We are in the middle of a pandemic that is worldwide, and we're doing well at this place. At the Beamsville Church of Christ. That's not to say that it's easy, but that we do our part to reach out to one another, to pray for one another, and to encourage one another. And we're grateful that we can study the Word of God and continue to learn from the Word of God.

Today, I want to look at a book that we seldom look at. It's not a book that we ever are going to spend a six week series on. It's it's a little book with only 25 verses. It's the book of, as Haddon Robinson would call it, Filla-mon I've always pronounced it Philemon and have it, Robinson said. If you really want to know how it's pronounced in English, it's Philemon and not going to argue with Haydn Robinson. But if he doesn't, in my mind, I'm going to call them Philemon. I've called them finally and all my life anyway. And this is really a wonderful story. It has to do with everything. It has to do with physical lives. It has to do with people who were considered such a low class that in many cases weren't really considered. Even people. It's a remarkable story, and there are some people that will

notice. One, of course, is Jesus Christ. He doesn't appear in this story, but it's all about him and his love and welcome for all of us. But there is a man by the name of Philemon who has a number of slaves. Philemon is a Christian, and yes, he had a number of slaves.

That sounds so strange to us. Paul wrote this letter at a time when society was a world of carefully calibrated social distinction. What brought people together was not unity. It was their distinction where everybody knew their place. Step out of that place and there may be a problem. Remove slavery from Rome's economy and it grinds to a halt. Philemon is a Christian who has a number of slaves and that was not uncommon at that particular time. Social prejudice was a given. Slaves were not considered people. They had no rights. They had no voice. They were tools to work for the master. But Paul is writing this book to Philemon, who has a number of slaves. Philemon himself is a Christian, but he has a slave who decides, I don't want to be a slave anymore. And so he takes something from Philemon and he's on the run. His name, the slave is Onesimus. And as would happen, God intervenes and Onesimus becomes a Christian. This is the prelude of the story with that background. And please use your imagination if you can hear this story. It is one of the great stories in the scriptures of the love and the grace and the acceptance of God, even during very, very distinct prejudices of that time.

Let me just read to you the story. And if you want to follow on, if you brought a Bible on your phone or whatever, if not just just listen with me. Very brief book, Paul, when he writes this letter to him and he is in prison, as Paul often was. Now, before I continue, let me just say Paul was often not in prisons where you go down into a dungeon and it's dreary and he's thrown into the prison and the gates are locked. Make no distinction. That did happen. That did happen on occasion. That certainly did happen on occasion. But on this occasion, Paul was known by the authorities and he was under house arrest. In fact, when you read the Book of Acts, when you read the last chapter, you find that Paul is renting his own house at his own expense. But it was under the Roman guard. He was in jail in his own rented home. Paul often wrote letters, even though he was not in a particularly free way in here.

Paul is a prisoner of Jesus Christ and Timothy, our brother. And so Philemon, our dear friend and fellow worker, is also letting the people who are receiving this letter know that there are people involved in all of this. Philemon, our dear friend, our fellow worker, also to Apphia our sister, it might have been Philemon's wife, I'm not sure or Archippus, our fellow soldier. And I like this. And to the church that meets in your house, a house church. And sometimes that's a really cool thing to do. Do you ever have that opportunity? Just gather together in a small group. And they had this house church, a small house church. And then, as Paul would often begin his letter, he begins with this wonderful statement of grace, he says, And grace and peace to you from God, our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And here's what he says next. I always thank my God, as I remember you in my prayers. So this is Paul writing to Philemon. Philemon has a slave whose name is Onesimus and Onesimus runs away. And as he runs away, he comes in contact with Paul. And Paul teaches Onesimus about Christ and the runaway slave now becomes a Christian. So you could probably already guess if you haven't read the letter what Paul is going to be saying to Philemon. Will you welcome him back? Most slave owners did not consider slaves a person they were someone who just worked for them and that was it. They had no rights at all. And now Onesimus runs away. And he comes in contact with Paul and Onesimus becomes a Christian. So what do we do with all of this? Again, very brief letter, but let's just notice what happens.

I, verse four, I always thank my God, as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your love for all his people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may

be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we have. And then he says in verse seven, Your love has given me great joy and encouragement because you brother have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people. Philemon is known by many Christians. And then here is the plea.

Therefore, Paul says, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do. No pressure yet. I therefore appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul, an old man, and now also a prisoner of Christ. Jesus, that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains, obviously not physically, but spiritually. Paul, I think never minded too much going to jail. He had a great prison ministry. Wherever he went, he was arrested when people were released from jail. They were often Christians because of Paul. And here is this slave who was on the run.

Now, it's interesting. In verse 11, formerly Onesimus was useless to you, but now he has become useful. Both to you and me. And guess what the name Onesimus means? Useful. Useful. So this useless slave who runs away was never useless. He was useful, although he forgot that for a while. And he meets Paul in prison and he becomes a Christian. I wonder how many people Paul converted in prison. He was forceful in his preaching. He was forceful in his prayers. I could just picture in my mind and maybe you can, too. Paul being thrown once more into a dark, dingy prison and Paul on his knees loudly praying. Paul was not ashamed of praying in public and just praying and praying not just for himself, but for all these prisoners, some murderers and some other crimes that have taken place. And they hear him and they want to know who is this man? Paul, you're intellectual. We can tell by the way you talk. Who is this person to whom you pray? We pray to the gods. Who are you praying to? And Paul says, I pray to the God of Gods. And I pray to the Son of God who came for all of us and forgives us all our sins.

And the prisoner might say, Oh, Paul, he's not going to forgive me for my sins. If if that God knew what I did. Paul says all that God does know what you did. But He sends freedom and love and grace and opportunity and forgiveness for all. You are God's Son, the God of all gods. You are His son or daughter, even if you did not know that. So in this brief letter, it is a powerful letter to this slave who was on the run. And so Paul says, I would have liked to keep him. This is verse 13 so that he could take your place and helping me while I'm in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent. So that any favor you do for me would not seem forced, but would be voluntary. So there's some pressure there to say, Oh, please, by the way, I want you to do this, but it's voluntary. But I'll be really upset if you don't, which is kind of what he's saying. I want you to do this. Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever. No longer as a slave, but better than a slave as a dear brother.

So here's Onesimus who was a slave. For some reason, he felt like he was being mistreated or whatever. So he takes off and he runs and he takes something from the house of file. And so he's on the run. That's a death sentence, for sure. But he becomes a Christian while he's in house prison. And Paul converts. Now he's a brother in the Lord. And now Paul is writing to Philemon to say, Accept you. He is no longer a slave, even though he may still be a slave, but he is a brother in Christ to you. He's a changed person. When you see him next, you'll know he is a changed person. Jesus changes his life because Paul's life was changed. Paul knew how to talk to people because he knew how he lived before he was a Christian and now he knows how to live as a Christian. And how many people do you know in this world? Have you heard who have said at one point in time in their life, there's no way I

would ever, ever be a Christian and end up not only being a Christian, but a powerful preacher of the gospel.

It's a wonderful story that's happened many times in the past. So he says in verse 16, No longer as a slave, but better than a slave as a dear brother. He's very dear to me, but even dear to you both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord. So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. So this slave who took something from you and ran away. He's not the same person anymore. He's coming back. I want him to come back. And I want you to welcome him. And I want you to welcome him. Just as if you are welcoming me. In fact, I want you to welcome him. Just as if Jesus is coming to your house because He's saved by Jesus.

Finally, you're saved by Jesus. Onesimus is saved by Jesus. Paul is saved by Jesus. He is your brother. And if you want to keep him as a slave, somebody who will work for you, he's also your brother. And this is a profound understanding of how society had to change. Seeing slaves as Christians and being loved by their master was completely, completely unbelievable. And yet it's one of the ways in which people became Christians. So Paul says, I, Paul am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back, whatever it is. Not to mention a little bit of pressure here. Not to mention that you owe me for your very self. I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I write to you knowing that you will do even more than my ask. And one more thing. I like this. One more thing. Prepare a guestroom for me because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers. And I think this is supposition on my part. I think it might be just one way of Paul saying, Oh, by the way, I'm going to come and check on you. I want to see if you really going to do this. But I'm going to come back. And, you know, you know that Philemon is going to do this. Paul is asking Philemon and Paul is asking Onesimus. Paul is asking us that we see people through new eyes, that when we look into the eyes even of a person who has so damaged us that we can actually see the eyes of Jesus in there.

They may not see it yet. They may not be looking out yet. But they have that opportunity to change their eyes, to look through the eyes of Jesus. And so this is such a brief book, but it's it's a powerful book. When Philemon meets Onesimus again, can you just imagine? What will that be like? So I don't know what happens, but I think somebody might have given Philemon a heads up a Philemon. You know that Paul guy, right? Yeah. Yeah, I do. And, you know, and he mentions a few other names. Oh, and wasn't there a person that worked for you that was maybe even a slave Onesimus? Yeah, I know him, too. Just want you to know. Both Paul and Onesimus have been released from prison, and they're coming to visit. Can you imagine? I think. I think because this letter proceeded what was probably going to happen. Can you imagine when Philemon sees Onesimus? He doesn't see him through the same eyes. He sees him as a brother. He sees him as Christ himself coming to visit. This is what the gospel can do. Paul said, Whatever honest Amis owes you, charge it to my account.

Isn't that what Jesus says to God about us? Whatever Don has done. Jesus says to the Father. Charge it to me. I'll take care of that debt. I'll be paid. That debt will be paid. And this is the story of the gospel for all of us. All people are welcome. And sometimes we think of scriptures that talk about all people being welcomed as simply a salvation passage. But it's it's more than that. It's relational as well. In fact, when Paul writes to the province churches in Galatia, he says these words, For all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ. And then later at that great council in

Jerusalem, when you would think Christians would know better, arguing whether or not a Gentile Christian or Jewish Christian was first class or second class. And how are we going to work all this out when there are foods that we can't stand to eat and other things and so forth? Is this all? How is this ever going to be solved? And it was solved by Jesus. Welcomes all, forgives all. Welcome to the Table of God. Acts 15 nine. God did not discriminate between Jew and Gentile.

All are welcome to come to the Kingdom of God. I think right now, because of the pandemic that we're living in, people are their nerves are fried, people are upset, people aren't sleeping, people are ill. Some people go through this pandemic like nothing's happened to them at all. Some people have horrible dreams. Some people have relationships that are falling apart through no fault of their own, and they don't know what to do. They pray. And so we as Christians can come alongside others who are hurting so who can't pay their rent, some who can't buy food because the one that was with them is gone. Or for a variety of other reasons. And you all have these stories that's they're not unusual stories. They are not unusual stories. People are hurting in all kinds of ways. And we somehow can be a Philemon if we can be a restored, honest, if we can be the hands of Jesus, let's do so. Let's help each other in Christ, Jesus Amen.

## Closing prayer

Again, we thank you all for being here this morning. I thank Don for his message and for the thoughts around the table as we leave this place, let's pray, Father. As we leave this place, let us be strengthened in faith, be ready to serve and do what is good. We ask that you open our eyes and our hearts to serve those in need, and may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ with our spirits. Amen.

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