

A RUNAWAY RETURNS HOME

BIBLE TEXT : Philemon 1-25

LESSON 354 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor" (II Corinthians 8:9).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Philemon 1:1-25

- ¹ Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy *our* brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer,
- ² And to *our* beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:
- ³ Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- ⁴ I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers,
- ⁵ Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints;
- ⁶ That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.
- ⁷ For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.
- ⁸ Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient,
- ⁹ Yet for love's sake I rather beseech *thee*, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.
- ¹⁰ I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:
- ¹¹ Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me:
- ¹² Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels:
- ¹³ Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel:
- ¹⁴ But without thy mind would I

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

Paul a Prisoner

Because Paul had dared to preach about Jesus, he had been cast into a prison in Rome, Italy. He was no more a young man, and he longed to be with the people of God in the churches he had established. How much he would have liked to be free once more.

He was not discouraged, however, for he believed that through the prayers of the Christians he would soon be released. While there, he wrote letters of encouragement to the people of God, and those God-given letters are a part of God's Holy Word, the Bible.

Prison bars, chains, and guards cannot bind the spirit of a true child of God. "Our fathers, chained in prisons dark, were still in heart and conscience free." One man of God who was cast into a prison said that his chains were over-gilded with gold. Another prisoner for the Lord said that the stones of the prison looked like rubies.

A Convert

As he sat, with pen in hand, Paul's great heart of love reached out to others. We do not know how many were saved through Paul's ministry, but one of the many brought to Jesus by Paul was a young man named Onesimus. This young man, a servant of Philemon in Colosse, had become unhappy and had run away from his master to Rome. As an escaped slave, Onesimus may have been conscripted into the Roman army and assigned as a guard to Paul. In any case, he had heard Paul tell of Jesus, and had become a Christian.

Even today prison guards and prisoners hear about Jesus when Gospel workers go into the jails to tell others of what God has done for them, and give out Gospel literature. A great many have been convicted of sin and been truly saved as a result of this work.

Now that Onesimus was saved he could be a helper for Paul. How happy those hours spent together in Christian fellowship! How they must have prayed and sung praises to God!

Back to His Master

But Paul could not be selfish and keep Onesimus always with him there. He must send him back to his master, Philemon. But would he receive Onesimus? Would he give him back his place as a servant? or would he feel unkindly toward him for having run away? Not only had Onesimus belied his name, which means "profitable," but he had also wronged his master. Paul would write a letter to Philemon and send it with Onesimus; then everything would be all right.

Paul's Letter

The Epistle of Paul to Philemon, or the Book of Philemon, is Paul's letter asking that Philemon receive Onesimus once more into his employ. Paul knew that Philemon's great heart of love would reach out in forgiveness to that servant who had once been untrue. With open arms he would receive Onesimus, not only as a servant to continue his duties, but now as a brother in Christ and a helper and faithful worker for the Lord, too.

do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.

¹⁵ For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever;

¹⁶ Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?

¹⁷ If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.

¹⁸ If he hath wronged thee, or oweth *thee* ought, put that on mine account;

¹⁹ I Paul have written *it* with mine own hand, I will repay *it*: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.

²⁰ Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord.

²¹ Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.

²² But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.

²³ There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus;

²⁴ Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers.

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

Restitution

Onesimus was willing to make right every wrong he had done to his master. Every sinner who repents of his sin and receives forgiveness is willing to make right his past wrongs. Although it may not always be an easy thing to do, yet he goes to those whom he has wronged and asks forgiveness; he pays back the money he has stolen or received through false pretence; he confesses the lies he has told, and straightens out everything within his power. "If the wicked restore the pledge, give again what he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die" (Ezekiel 33:15).

Onesimus did not have to make his restitution without help, and neither will you or I have to make restitution without help. Paul pleaded for Onesimus, and Christ will act as counsellor today for everyone who has restitution to make (Isaiah 9:6). If we ask Him to lead and guide us, He will help us to know the best way in which to make our restitution, and He will help the one whom we have wronged to understand and forgive.

Kindness Rewarded

Sometimes an act of kindness or a deed of charity is done for one person for the sake of another. We read in the Bible of a little boy who became a cripple at the age of five. This little boy's father, Jonathan, had been a very close friend of David. In fact, Jonathan and David loved each other very, very much. When David was king, he sent for this crippled boy and told him not to be afraid. He said that he would be kind to him for Jonathan his father's sake, and would give him great riches, and all his life he would eat at the king's table. David had not forgotten the kindness of Jonathan to him, and he now had an opportunity to do good unto Mephibosheth, the cripple. (2 Samuel 4:4 ⁴ And Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son *that was* lame of *his* feet. He was five years old when the tidings came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel, and his nurse took him up, and fled: and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame. And his name *was* Mephibosheth. 2 Samuel 9:5-7 ⁵ Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lodebar. ⁶ Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant!⁷ And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually.)

For Another

Paul added another paragraph to his letter asking his friend to receive Onesimus as freely as Philemon would receive Paul: Did Onesimus owe anything to his master? Had he wronged Philemon? If so, "Put that on mine account," Paul said. "I will repay it."

When a child comes to God, turning away from his sins and asking for pardon for his sins, Jesus steps in and says, "Father, receive him as myself. I shed my Blood and died that he might be forgiven." The sinner has sinned against God, but when he comes repenting, God forgives him for Jesus' sake.

Back Home

The long, weary road back to Colosse finally came to an end when Onesimus returned to Philemon. How much he was like the prodigal son who returned footsore and weary, his clothing worn, his money wasted, but the kind Father who watched from a great way off freely forgave all.

In his hand Onesimus carried the letter written by Paul, asking for mercy and forgiveness. We who are saved today can look back to the day that we returned to God, and in our hand we held

a pardon, signed with the precious Blood of Jesus. "He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12).

Forgiven

How happy Onesimus was now! How thankful to Paul who had interceded with Philemon, his master! What a debt of love and gratitude he owed to Paul and to Philemon! But how much more he owed to Jesus for a clean heart, a clear record, and a new start in life! How much we owe to God and to Christ who paid our debt, took our sins and restored us to the family of God! "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19).

**"Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow."**

QUESTIONS

1. Where was Paul when this letter was written?
2. To whom was it sent and by whom carried?
3. What position had Onesimus held with Philemon?
4. What was to be his new station?
5. What does the Bible teach about restitution?
6. What did Paul say in the letter that lets us know he hoped to be released from prison?
7. What did Paul say regarding the debts of Onesimus?
8. To whom did Onesimus owe great thanks?
9. To whom do we owe a debt of love and willing service,
10. How can we prove our love for Jesus?