

The Power of the Gospel on Display

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[0 : 00] And take your Bibles again and turn to the book of Philemon. If you don't know where that is, it's near the end. It's sandwiched between Titus and Hebrews.

The book of Philemon. I will read the whole book. Let's hear God's word. Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy, our brother, to Philemon, our dear friend and fellow worker, to Apphia, our sister, to Archippus, our fellow soldier, and to the church that meets in your home.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints.

I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. Your love has given me great joy and encouragement because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.

Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus, I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.

[1 : 28] Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. I am sending him, who is my very heart, back to you. I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel.

But I did not want to do anything without your consent so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced. Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good.

No longer is a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me, but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand.

I will pay it back, not to mention that you owe me your very self. I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.

[2 : 38] Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask. And one thing more, prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greeting, as so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Let's hear the preaching of God's word. The Bible is a wonderful book, a gift from heaven.

It's a collection of 66 books, written by some 40 different human authors. And these books come to us in different forms.

We have different literary structures. We have poetry. We have history, just historical narratives. We have letters to churches. And then we have even a personal letter.

[3 : 47] And all 66 of these books come to us, breathed out by God, and therefore profitable for us. And one of the books is a personal letter from Paul to a dear friend of his, Philemon.

And that's our text for today. This could be a part of our series on great chapters of the Bible, because the whole book is just one chapter. A short letter of just 334 words in the original Greek.

And the fact that this personal letter is part of the sacred canon for the church until Jesus returns means it's something important to us.

It has something that we should not miss. And what is that? That God himself does not want us to miss. Well, in this personal letter, we're shown the power of the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ in at least two ways.

First of all, it's power to change lives for the better. And that is seen in this runaway slave, Onesimus. His name means useful, but he went from being useless to becoming useful.

[5 : 10] And that was the power, owing to the power of the gospel of God's grace. The second theme of this letter is that this same gospel of God's grace has power to make us gracious in our relationships with one another.

So let me give you the background of the letter. Paul's an old man. He's in prison in Rome for the sake of the gospel of Christ, waiting the decision of the emperor Nero.

And from prison, he writes this letter with his own hand, though Timothy is there with him. It's a personal letter to his friend Philemon, who's a wealthy slave owner in the city of Colossae.

He's been converted under Paul's ministry and had not only become a dearly beloved friend, but also a fellow worker in the cause of the gospel of Christ there in Colossae.

Aphia is apparently his wife, and together they had opened their home for the church of God to meet in there in Colossae. Archippus, probably a son or at least a relative, is said to be a fellow soldier.

[6 : 27] Probably had responsibilities to preach the gospel there in their church house in Colossae. And though it's a personal letter to Philemon, Paul wants it read to the church meeting in his home as well.

In other words, it carries important lessons for all the believers, and us included. Onesimus, he's one of Philemon's slaves.

He's apparently stolen from his master and run away. Now that was a serious offense in the first century Roman Empire. It could be punished by being whipped, by hot iron, or even by death.

Slave catchers were often hired to hunt down the runaways for a reward. And those who lived were branded on the forehead as fugitives for life.

So Onesimus runs away, and he flees to Rome. To Rome, the largest city in the empire.

[7 : 42] It's easy to get lost in the big city. It's over a thousand miles away from Colossae, far from his master Philemon's home.

Surely he'll be safe there. And here's where we see the amazing, remarkable providence of God ordering the steps of Onesimus, the runaway slave.

Because in this vast city of Rome, with all of its people, is one individual that he needs to meet. It's the apostle Paul, a friend of Onesimus' master Philemon.

Oh, but not to worry because Paul's locked away in one of the prisons there in Rome. And though we're not told how or why, somehow Onesimus, the runaway slave, ends up at the prison talking with Paul.

What are the odds of that happening? A thousand miles away from home in the large city, the largest city of the empire. Well, wouldn't you love to be a mouse in that prison, to listen in on that conversation between the apostle and Onesimus?

[9 : 02] I wonder how long it took for Paul to find out who Onesimus was, the slave of his friend Philemon. If we know Paul at all, we know it didn't take long at all for him to get around to the gospel.

Onesimus, what are you doing so far from home? With his head drooping, Onesimus pours out his sad story.

So you're running away from your master, are you? You're also running away from God, aren't you? I know because I once did the same myself.

But as you see, you can run, but you can't hide from God. He's chased you down all those thousand miles here to Rome. And he's brought you here to me in this prison because he's got good news for you, friend.

We're all runaways from God. We've stolen his glory, his praise, his worship. And after he's given us life and breath and everything else, so good is he.

[10 : 08] We refuse to obey him. We refuse to serve him and to give him the honor due his name. Oh, we were runaways deserving of his eternal wrath.

But God, in amazing grace, did not come to judge us, but instead sent his one and only son, Jesus Christ, to save sinners like you and me.

We who have broken his law and wanted nothing to do with him. He was sinless. And yet in amazing love, he laid down his life. He suffered and died under God's wrath for sinners.

And took the sins of many upon himself and suffered the punishment they deserved. And then he arose from the dead and he ascended into heaven.

And he sent me and many others out as his ambassadors to say, as I am now saying to you, Onesimus, be reconciled to God. For God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[11 : 14] Onesimus, Jesus says, turn to me, come to me, trust in me, bring me your sins, I'll forgive them and give you my righteousness and give you peace with God.

And friend, if Jesus could forgive me, he can forgive you. However the conversation went between Paul and Onesimus, at some point there in that Roman prison, a thousand miles away from home, this runaway slave cast himself upon the mercy of God in Jesus Christ and was wonderfully saved.

Paul says in verse 10, he became my son while I was in chains. Soon Onesimus was a great help to Paul in prison.

But Paul sends him back to Colossae to his owner Philemon along with this letter that we're reading this morning. Can you imagine that thousand mile journey back home for Onesimus?

Most of it probably by way of ship. But he's preparing his confession to his master Philemon.

[12 : 36] He's wondering how he'll be received, what punishments might be doled out to him. And so weeks later, Philemon's in his home and in walks Onesimus, his runaway slave.

After the initial shock, he sees that Onesimus is clearly broken. Over his crime, as he pours out his confession and then quickly pulls from his belt this letter from the Apostle Paul, his friend.

So this page in our Bibles is what Philemon unravels and is now reading. A letter in which Paul pours out his very heart to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus and piles appeal after appeal for him to graciously forgive Onesimus and receive him back no longer just as a slave but as a brother in the Lord.

So let's look over the shoulder of Philemon as he reads and see what he's reading. We notice right off the bat that it's not until verse 10 that he brings up the name Onesimus and there's a reason for that.

He's the reason for the whole letter. Paul's preparing Philemon to drop that name in the letter.

[14 : 13] He's preparing Philemon for his request and he's seeking to move Philemon's heart and mind and will to willingly comply with what he's asking him to do because Paul knows that what he's asking will not be easy.

So he loads up gentle yet powerful persuasions humbly tactfully setting forth incentives heart moving motivations and appeals and we see it at once as we'll see it throughout the letter.

In verse 1 he commends Philemon as a dear friend and fellow worker. We're off on a good start. You're my dear friend and my fellow worker.

Verse 3 Paul then prays for grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus to be upon his friend because he's going to need grace in order to be gracious.

And then in verses 4 and 5 he tells him he can't pray for him without thanking God for his faith in the Lord Jesus and his love for all the saints. In verse 7 he praises him for refreshing the hearts of the saints the way he's relieved their troubles and cares.

[15 : 29] You can say it's well known that wherever you go you leave behind a trail of encouraged saints. grace. So he's watering with praise what he wants to see grow more and more in his friend Philemon.

Philemon just hearing about your love has given me here in prison cause for great joy and encouragement. so he's he's wanting to water that grace of love and move him to show grace to Onesimus because he's got a work of love here set before him that's going to stretch him to the limit.

So we now come to the body of the letter. He's getting closer now to mentioning that name Onesimus but he still approaches so tactfully and kindly.

Verse 8 In Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do. He is after all an apostle of Christ with the authority of Christ to give commands in line with Christ.

but he says no I'm not going to do that. Not here not now. Instead I'm appealing to you on the basis of love.

[16 : 53] Maybe others need a command from me as an apostle but not you. I know you love me and you know I love you and you know Christ loved us and so I'm appealing to you rather than commanding I'm appealing to you on behalf and on the basis of love.

Love is a powerful motivation. Love moves people to do things they otherwise would never do and Paul knows it by experience and so he's using the lever of love here.

For Christ's love compels us to no longer live for ourselves but for him who died and rose again. and so he's appealing to him on the basis of love and yet it's such a backhanded way an indirect way yet he lets Philemon know that what he's about to ask him to do is something he really ought to do.

Do you see that in verse 8? In Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do. In other words this is a duty this is something you owe as a Christian.

So ever so gently he was reminding him this is your Christian obligation and duty but instead of commanding I'm appealing to you on the basis of love.

- [18 : 26] Verse 9 he goes on to say I then as Paul an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus. You see he's appealing to Philemon's love for him here I am an old man in prison.
- Will you hear me friend? I'm just an old man in prison. He's playing upon his heart strings isn't he? It's hard to ignore the appeals of someone who suffered so much for the gospel.
- I then an old man and prisoner for Christ verse 10 I appeal to you for my son Onesimus who became my son while I was in chains.
- Notice he doesn't just drop the name Onesimus no it's my son Onesimus. Philemon's slave had become Paul's son his spiritual son in the faith while he was in prison.
- Here I am an old man in prison with a favor to ask of you for my son Onesimus. He's pulling hard on the heart strings of Philemon's love for Paul.
- [19 : 43] Even before he's defining the favor that he's asking of him. Now the name Onesimus as I said means useful. It means beneficial. It means profitable. That name was given to many slaves.
- So when you said Onesimus you were saying useful. And Paul now makes a play on the word in verse 11. He says formerly he was useless to you but now he's become useful both to you and to me.
- So here's the first lesson in this letter. The life transforming power of the gospel of God's grace. It makes useless people useful.
- Beneficial to others. Onesimus had been useless to Philemon. Even worse he was a liability. He was a loss.
- He was a loser. He was useless to Philemon as a slave. He had run away. He had not benefited Philemon.
- [20 : 52] He was useless. He lived for the God of self. And that doesn't leave much that is useful for others. But transformed by the power of the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ, he was now useful.
- He was now beneficial. For he now does his work as under the Lord and with a new spirit of humble service to others. Philemon, the man I'm sending back to you is not the same man you once had.
- He's been changed from the inside out by the power of Jesus Christ. He's got a new heart. He's got a new master in heaven. A new love. A new humility.
- A new heart of service. A new reason to live. And this new usefulness ought to make Philemon eager then to have him back.
- Has the gospel made you useful to others? Has it made you useful, beneficial, profitable to others?
- [22 : 09] When you interact with people in their lives, do they see dollar signs on the profitability side of the equation? Or do they see loss?
- The gospel takes us as useless, serving ourselves, bent in upon ourselves, and it turns us outward, and we become useful both to God and to men.
- It's a mark of the gospel. And that's the glory of the gospel. It makes young people useful to their parents and parents useful to their children.
- It makes husbands useful to their wives and wives useful to their husbands. It makes employees useful to their employer and their employer useful to the employee.
- It makes you useful to your neighbors, to your brothers and sisters here in Christ. Indeed, to all that you are involved with in life. They're better off for knowing you.
- [23 : 16] That's what Jesus Christ does for his people. Notice Paul says, Onesimus has now become useful both to you and to me.

And to me. He'd already begun serving Paul there in prison. And so verse 12, Paul continues to write.

He says, Well, I'm sending him who is my very heart back to you. It's like Paul saying, I'm going to cut out my heart and send it back to you.

That's who this guy is, Onesimus. He's my very heart. You see how Paul's making it harder and harder for Philemon to refuse a request for one who is not only Paul's son, but is now Paul's very heart.

He goes on in verse 13 and 14, I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I'm in chains for the gospel. I know your heart toward me, Philemon, would be to want to help me and to have your servant serve me, but he says, I didn't want to do anything without your consent so that any favor you do will be spontaneous on your part and not forced on my part, from me.

[24 : 38] I don't want to pressure you into anything. Just by sheer force, Paul is appealing to a different kind of force, the powerful force of love.

We all have something to learn from Paul in that. Well, next Paul appeals to the secret providence of God behind all that has happened, in this whole scenario.

Verse 15, perhaps, perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good.

Notice Paul doesn't say, perhaps the reason he ran away. No, he's not talking about what Onesimus did. He's redirecting Philemon's eyes to what God was doing when he separated Onesimus from him for a while.

Separated him by his providence, by his hand that governs all things that happen. And so, what Paul's wanting to do for Philemon, his friend, is to lift his eyes from Onesimus and what he did, running away, to consider what God was doing in all of that.

[26 : 07] Perhaps, perhaps, he was separated from you for a little while that you might have him back for good.

He's lifting Paul's eyes to see this God of providence who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will. He's directing his eyes to him who works in everything in life so that we can know that in all things, he's working for the good of those who love him and are the called according to his purpose.

That for his people, God always has a good purpose. He's working out in everything. Even overcoming, overruling evil and making it serve his good purpose.

Like Joseph says to his brothers when he finally reveals himself to them and he says, you sold me into slavery for decades.

You meant it for evil but God meant it for good, for the saving of many alive. Perhaps, perhaps, Philemon, the reason Onesimus was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good, forever.

[27 : 32] Since by going away to Rome, he's found me and hearing from me the gospel, he has found eternal life in Jesus Christ. Christ. So that you'll never be parted again.

Your loss was for a little while. Your gain is forever. Could it be that it all happened for this and God's mysterious promise, a providence, that you might have him back, not only for good, but he goes on, also verse 16, that you might have him back no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother.

Oh, he's very dear to me, but even dearer to you, both as a man in your service and as a brother in the Lord. Philemon, he left you as a hell bound slave, and you have him back as a dear brother in Christ forever.

You lost a slave, you gained a brother forever. That's the new element in this relationship between Philemon and Onesimus, and it changes everything about the relationship.

That's what the gospel does. So after piling gracious appeal after gracious appeal, Paul's now coming in for the kill. Verse 17, he says, so, so, here it is.

[29 : 10] It's like all these piled up reasons are now coming for a response by Laman. So, if you consider me a partner, Paul writes, welcome him as you would welcome me.

Now, of course, Philemon considers Paul as a partner. They're dear friends and partners in the gospel. Well, then welcome him. as you would welcome me.

You know, if you love me, you love my family, don't you? And you love them because of me, because they're mine. And so Paul writes, welcome Onesimus as you would welcome me, because he's my son.

He's my dear brother. He's mine. on my tab. We're family now. So, Paul is identifying himself with Onesimus and appealing for Philemon to receive him because of Paul.

And he says in verse 18, if he's done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. Put it on my tab.

[30 : 32] I'll assume the debt myself and I'll pay it, whatever it is. And right away, he says, I, Paul, am writing this letter with my own hand. I think he's saying, I'm signing this I owe you to you with my own hand.

I'm guaranteeing it. I will pay it back. Verse 19, not to mention that you owe me your very self. What's he mean?

You owe me your very self. Well, Philemon had been converted when Paul took the gospel to him. He was saved from everlasting wrath to everlasting delights with Christ.

Paul says, not to mention that you owe me your very life. I'll pay you back, but not to mention what you owe me. Philemon owed a far greater debt to Paul for his conversion than any debt of Onesimus to him.

So Paul says not to mention it. But then he mentions it. You see, that's a way of softening what he's saying.

[31 : 49] He's not making a demand because of it. You know you owe me. It's a, it's a, it's a, again, a backhanded way to come around and say, just remember this.

You've profited from me in the past. Now, now give me some benefit in the present. Well, that was the coup de grace.

How could Philemon ever dismiss such appeals of love to forgive Onesimus for Paul's sake? I want to ask you, does this remind you of anything, Christian?

Like maybe what Jesus Christ said to his heavenly father concerning you? Father, welcome him as you have welcomed me.

And if he's done you any wrong, father, if he owes you anything, charge it to me and I will pay it back in full.

[33 : 00] Brothers and sisters, did we not have hell to pay for our sins and wrongs done to God? And was not the debt we incurred to his just wrath so great that we could never repay it?

And did God not charge it to Christ? And did Christ not assume the debt himself? Did the father not lay on him the iniquities of us all?

did he not was he not made sin for you and and did he not bear your sin to the place of punishment on the cross and pay it back in full crying it is finished.

So that he now says to his father welcome him as you would welcome me. Look on me and pardon him and him and her and her.

For they are mine and I am theirs and we are one forever and forever. That's the gospel of God's grace.

- [34 : 10] That's the gospel of grace to us hell deserving unworthy sinners. And that is the power that transforms our relationships with others.
- Making us willing to forgive even as we have been forgiven. Even as we have been forgiven. We are not willing to assume the debt ourselves and not to get even.
- To assume the pain. Yes the pain of not being able to pay back. not being able to demand payment for the harm done to me.
- It's the gospel of grace that has the power to return good for the evil. Even as God has done with my evil against him.
- It's the power to enable us to give grace and mercy as it's been given to us. Since from his fullness have all we received grace upon grace for our sin upon sin.
- [35 : 17] The gospel gives us power and makes us willing to love those who have offended and wronged and dishonored us. So there's a power in the gospel of God's grace to do just that.
- All of that. Grace. G-R-A-C-E. God's riches at Christ's expense. That's what we've received. And that's what we give in our relationships.
- That one thing will leave none of our relationships the same. Not even Philemon's relationship to his runaway thieving slave is the same.
- Because of the power of God's grace in the gospel. Not to mention Paul's relationship with Philemon. And can you hear it in this letter? What's the relationship of Paul and Philemon?
- It's grace upon grace. Working both ways. Love and humility shown for each other. And not to mention Paul's relationship with Onesimus.
- [36 : 21] To take a loving interest in some runaway slave. And to love him so much that he gives him the gospel.
- And prays for his conversion. And sees him born again and trusting in Christ. And being made a new creature. And Paul's relationship with him is marked by this Christ-like love.
- That would call him my son. Who? The lowest one on the totem pole. A slave in first century Roman Empire.
- Oh, but it goes lower. He's a runaway slave. It goes lower. He's a thieving runaway slave. Probably stole the money for the passage to Rome.
- And living expenses as well. And yet Paul says he's my son. My dearly loved brother. You see how grace affects relationships.
- [37 : 29] Relationships. Well, the gospel of God's grace in Christ does strange things to all our relationships.
- It does supernatural things. It does things that only grace can do. Christ-like things to the glory of his grace. First received and then given.
- Well, Paul, he's still not done clenching the nail. You know that statement. To clench the nail. You've got two boards and you drive a nail through the two boards.
- And there's still a bit of the nail sticking out below. What do you do? Well, you take your hammer and you knock it over and pound it into the wood. And they say that it seals the bond ten times.
- Ten times the strength when you clench the nail. Well, Paul's got the hammer and he's clenching this nail in verse 20. He says, I do wish, brother.
- [38 : 31] I wish that I may have some benefit from you and the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. You've been refreshing the hearts of others, verse 7.

I thank God for that. But I wish, if it's not too much to ask, that you would refresh my heart too. By receiving Onesimus, my son, back.

With grace and kindness. Oh, how my heart would leap for joy here in my prison. And you, my friend, have the capacity to do that for me.

I wish you would. Do you see that gentleness? Yes, humility, the love between these two and the way Paul is addressed. And he goes on, confident of your obedience.

Verse 21. I write to you knowing that you will do even more than I ask. I'm writing not because I doubt you, my friend, but because I'm confident of your obedience.

[39 : 34] Isn't it interesting? He drops the word obedience. Confident of your obedience even to my wish. Because I know your love for me is such that my wish is your command.

And so I do wish, my brother, that you would refresh my heart. Paul's got him over a barrel full of the strongest and gentlest persuasions. And you see how he's encouraging all of that gracious response by way of praise for his friend.

And one thing more. He's not done yet. Verse 22. Prepare a guest room for me because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers. What's he doing?

He's acknowledging and showing appreciation for Philemon's prayers. I know you're praying for me. And when I'm set free, I hope to visit you.

I want to see you face to face, friend. And of course, that means then that if Paul's coming to see him, he's going to see right up close what Philemon's done with Onesimus, isn't he?

[40 : 45] So pressure, but ever so gentle. Argument after argument. Appeal from love and mercy and grace.

And even the closing greetings about the five fellow workers that are there with Paul in Rome would be a reminder. There's five more sets of ears just waiting to hear.

What's Philemon going to do with his slave Onesimus? Again, gentle encouragement to do the right.

I've counted somewhere between 20 to 25 different appeals that Paul in this letter piles up one after another. Was it overkill? Well, it would be if it were not dripping with such humility and grace and tenderness of heart.

And all from a dear friend who loved him enough to bring the gospel that saved him from the coming wrath forever. But why?

[41 : 48] Why so many appeals to forgive and to receive Onesimus back? Not with justice, but with mercy and grace.

Because Paul knows how strongly the flesh cries for revenge, to get even, to pay back. Paul had been sinned against horrifically.

He'd been stoned and left for dead by people he sought to bring the gospel to. Paul was a man of like passions with us.

He felt the flesh saying, well then, I'm going to give you back some of your own medicine. No. No.

He felt that though. He knows the battle that Philemon is going to be in. And so he knows he needs some real heavy ammunition to combat such deeply entrenched desires.

[42 : 50] So what is there that's stronger than the flesh? The grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And that's what he pours out upon his friend Philemon. So having pressed this grace of God that Philemon had received in Jesus Christ, Paul, who started this letter with a prayer for grace and peace, now ends with a prayer for further grace.

Because it's God's grace that Philemon will need to enable him to be gracious to Onesimus. So grace has the first and has the last word. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Be with your spirit. That grace had saved and saturated the apostle Paul. And he now prays that the same grace would saturate the spirit of his dear friend Philemon.

And move him to show undeserved favor himself. So get the picture. We're back in Philemon's home. And there's Philemon.

And he's finally come to the end of Paul's letter. And he looks up to see Onesimus there, perhaps on his knees, awaiting the reply of his master. So what happened next?

[44 : 07] My Bible is blank at the end of verse 25. In other words, we're not told what happened next. And I believe that's because we don't need to be told what happened next.

You remember one day when Jesus and Peter were in the house and two from the temple came to collect the temple tax. And Peter goes out and talks with them. And when he comes in, Jesus says, what did they want?

Well, they wanted the tax. And Jesus talks to him for a while and says, well, do the children have to pay the tax? No, not children. Well, then really we shouldn't have to. But so we don't offend them.

You go down to the lake and throw in your line and catch a fish. And the very first one that you catch will have a coin in it that will just pay the two drachma tax for you and me.

And that's the end of the story. We're never told what happened. We don't need to be told. By then, in Matthew's account of the gospel, we know that every time Jesus says something, it happens.

[45 : 15] And I think it's something similar here. We really don't need to be told what happened. I mean, we've just been told some 20 to 25 times with these powerful persuasions.

I'm confident that you'll do what I'm asking you. All of those things piled on. The gospel that's come to you, my friend. And grace that's come at Jesus' expense.

Now, show that same grace. I think the fact that we have this letter in our possession today is proof enough that when Philemon got the letter, he didn't read it, tear it up and throw it in the trash bin and punish his slave to the fullest degree.

No, he treasured that letter. He kept that letter.

Maybe he needed to read it every time his flesh felt like getting a pound of flesh from Onesimus. Oh, yes. Yes. So that here we are 2,000 years later and we've got that letter in our possession.

[46 : 33] Yes, he received him back. And did do what Paul had asked him to do. And perhaps even more. Not only forgiving him and receiving him back as a brother, but perhaps even setting him free from his slavery.

You can ask him when you get to heaven. Onesimus, did Philemon release you and give you his freedom? Give you freedom. But you see, if that was important, it would be in our Bibles.

We'd have a verse 26 and following. But it's not there. And so the greater issue is to be answered, not about Philemon, but about you and me. And that's why the letters in our Bibles.

Has the grace of God in the gospel left its imprint upon every one of your relationships? Having freely received grace from God, do you give it freely to others?

Having freely received, graciously received. Do you give it graciously? That's what it means in Philippians 1.27. To conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel.

[47 : 45] What does that mean? Well, in the gospel, God treats hell-deserving sinners with kindness and love. That means that whatever happens to me, I'm to treat others with the same kindness and love that's worthy of the gospel.

The gospel's brought forgiveness for all my sins. Am I forgiving as I've been forgiven? Freely, fully, and for Jesus' sake.

Because that's what he's asked now of me. So does everyone in your relationships taste the same spirit, the same flavor? Christ-like favor of undeserved kindness.

And if you're lost, we've seen that the way the gospel powerfully changes our relationships, but it has to change you first before it can change your relationships.

It's only as forgiven people that we forgive. And maybe you're still running away from your master, the master of heaven and earth.

[49 : 02] Still robbing him of his praise, of your love, of your obedience, of your service, of your life. Oh, stop running away from the Lord Jesus.

You know, he's chasing you just like he chased Onesimus. It's not with a sword of justice. It's rather with a gospel of peace.

It's not to destroy you, but to save you. You know what he's got in his hand? He's got a full pardon to forgive you for every sin you ever committed or ever will. He's got that.

He's chasing you down with the promise of forgiveness if you will but come to him. He's got eternal life in his hand. He's got himself to give you as your portion in time and eternity.

He's got himself as your greatest savior and friend forever. Stop running from him and turn and run into his arms.

[50 : 04] That's the only place that there's peace with God and joy unspeakable and full of glory. You turn to him and you know what you'll find? You'll find the same mercy and grace that Paul found, that Philemon found, that Onesimus found, and that all of us runaways who have come to Jesus have found.

Because he not only has mercy, he delights to give mercy. Such is his heart. Let's pray and thank you. Lord, we know this letter was written because of a real painful situation that came into the life of Philemon.

And yet we thank you for the wonderful lessons that you have squeezed out of a painful situation. And how you take what was evil and turn it into something good.

And oh, may it have that power of good in our hearts this morning. And not just here and now, but as we go out into the world and a host of different relationships from within the family, right on out into our world.

Stamp us with this spirit of Christ, the spirit of the gospel, the spirit of grace. Enable us to walk worthy of such a gospel and such a savior.

[51 : 27] And bring others who are running from you to run to you. And so to experience what we have come to taste. To taste and see that the Lord is indeed gracious.

As good as you are great, we praise you. In Jesus' name. Amen. Let our response to the word of God this morning be number 142.

In your hymnal 142. One there is above all others well deserves the name of friend. And we're going to sing in verse 4.

Could we bear from one another what he daily bears from us? Yet this glorious friend and brother loves us. Though we treat him thus. Though for good we render ill.

He accounts us brethren still. Let's stand and make this our cry and response to the Lord. Let our Eevee heart to veiled all others well deserves the name of friend.

[52 : 41] This is all beyond the promise, all sweetly and no strong end.
May you once his kindness prove, I may ever have seen love.
Which of all our friends to save us, turn your blood that share with us.
Lord, our Jesus died to heaven, a strength of love in him to God.
This was countless love in me, Jesus is our friend in me.

[53 : 54] When he lived on earth a day, when the sinners was his day.
Now, while love on glory reigns, he rejoices in the same.
Still he falls and breath will dance, and to all there was a chance.
Good be there from one another, long be near be there from us.
Yet his glorious strength and brother, God's love, reach the end of us.

[55 : 08] Oh, for will we render ill, he accounts us reverence still.
Oh, for grace our hearts too saunter. Teach us more and way to love.
We'll ask for him to love him. What a friend we have above.
God, when hope our souls are proud. We will love thee as we are.
Freely you have received, freely give. Amen. Amen.