

The Gospel Changes Everything

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Well, if you go to the book of Titus, there is a book right after that called Philemon. It's right before Hebrews. Would you go there, the book Philemon. We're going to begin preaching through that book today. Today's message will serve as an introduction to the book of Philemon. It's that short little one chapter, that's the way we've divided it, at least in latter days, and I've entitled this series of messages going through Philemon "The Gospel Changes Everything." The Gospel changes everything.

Philemon 1, we'll read the first three verses this morning together. Philemon 1, beginning in verse 1.

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker, 2 and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is how we typically do an introduction. First of all, I. we talk about the author. Of course, the human author is the Apostle Paul. The divine author is the Holy Spirit of God.

The Apostle Paul was, as you remember well, an ardent enemy of Christ and of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was an elite Jewish leader. He was of the sect of the Pharisees. He said, "I'm so high up, I'm a Pharisee of the Pharisees." He was of noble lineage. He was an authority on the law of God. Then on his way to persecute Christians, he was converted on the Damascus Road. God radically transformed this man. He became a Gospel preacher. God placed him in the office of apostle. He was an evangelist, a church planter, a revivalist. He is the human author of 13 books of the New Testament. But here in our text as he writes to Philemon, he uses this title, "Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus." This is the Christ whom he saw, who was revealed to him when he was converted on the road to Damascus, and Paul, you see, saw Christ behind everything in his life, including his present imprisonment by Rome.

Paul had, well, he had earned a lot of titles and he was well worthy of them: apostle, man of prayer, scholar, theologian, statesman. In fact, he's the most esteemed man in all of Christendom, second of course, to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But here Paul gives himself a new title, he said, "I am the prisoner of Christ Jesus." Now, he didn't say, "I'm

the prisoner of Nero," that was the Roman Emperor who had him imprisoned; he did not say, "I am the prisoner of Rome." No, Paul and this is a good application for all of us, Paul saw his condition just exactly as we must all view our present lot in life, that it is ordained of divine providence. You are where you are, you are in the condition you are in, because divine providence has ordained it. If any other place, if any other condition would be better for you, you would have been there. Paul says, "I'm the prisoner of Christ Jesus."

Preaching the Gospel in this day, you see, was deeply offensive. It is getting more and more offensive in our day. It was offensive to both Jews and the Greeks or the Gentiles, and Paul was in prison for preaching the Gospel. That's the reason he was in prison but it was Jesus Christ who put him there. That's the way Paul views it. To Paul, Jesus put the iron bracelets on his wrists to which was attached the chains, and Paul wore these in honor of his Lord with the same acceptance and the same joy as a bride wears the bracelet her groom gives her on her wedding day. This was his Lord's assignment.

It reminds me of the story of Joseph. Joseph had the dream that he would rule over his brothers, his brothers would bow down to him. It might be a good idea if God gives you a dream like that, you don't tell that to your brothers. Just keep it to yourself. They were jealous. He was their father's favorite. They had him sold into slavery, if you will, into an Egyptian caravan. He ends up in Egypt. He interprets some dreams. Miracle after miracle happens. He becomes the most powerful man in Egypt, just under the pharaoh. The famine hits the land. His brothers journey to Egypt, not knowing he is the leader and in command of all of Egypt. His brothers actually bow down before him, not recognizing him. Through a series of events, he reveals to his brothers, "It's me, Joseph, the one you threw away, the one you thought was probably dead by now." They were terrified, "What is Joseph going to do to us?" And Joseph said, "Look, you don't understand something: you indeed meant this for evil but God meant it for good." That's where Paul is. Certainly, absolutely an injustice Paul became a slave, a prisoner of Rome, an injustice, he had been falsely accused, but he said, "Rome don't have final authority over me. God is behind us." The Lord Jesus Christ as Acts 2:23 teaches us, "this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." God is behind all of this though you were active in a criminal act of putting Jesus to death.

So the Apostle Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, the human author, but he goes on and says in verse 1, "and Timothy our brother." Now we know who Timothy is, he is Paul's associate. He's the young understudy of the Apostle Paul. He's a counselor for Paul. He was a friend to Philemon whom Paul is writing to and to the church that met in Philemon's house and he was converted under Paul's ministry. In 1 Corinthians 4:17, Paul says he "is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord." And in 1 Timothy 1:2, he says he is "my true child in the faith." Timothy joined the Apostle Paul's ministry early in Paul's missionary endeavors and Timothy, it seems, stayed faithful all the way to the end and that's quite noteworthy because Paul points out how many of his associates went south on him, bailed out on him, but Timothy never did. Timothy was his faithful associate.

Beyond Paul and beyond Timothy, we know the real author is the Holy Spirit of God. Scripture has deity as its author. 2 Timothy 3:16 reminds us that "Scripture is inspired by God," literally Scripture is God-breathed, breathed out of God. God is the source behind the human biblical authors. Through the Holy Spirit, God superintended through these human writers the exact words that he wanted penned as sacred Scripture. The Scriptures are, therefore, infallible and inerrant and fully trustworthy.

We hold to what is called plenary verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. Plenary means all of the Bible is equally inspired; verbal means every word is inspired. Now you've got to be careful because there are a lot of tricky liberal tricks that go on here. There are those who say, "Oh, yes, we believe the Bible is authoritative when it speaks of theological issues." No, that's not what we believe. We believe the Bible is authoritative. Period. "Oh, we believe the inspired thoughts of Scripture are inspired by God." But, no, we believe the Bible, every word and all the words are inspired by God. Now, this is a mountain we will die on at Grace Life Church. We can disagree on 1001 things that are secondary matters, but the inerrancy, the authority, the plenary verbal inspiration of the word of God is absolutely without negotiation in this church. Period. Now we'll love you, we can consider you our friend, but you cannot be a member of this church and reject the authority of Scripture. Period. We haven't said that in a long time, I just want to say it again. That's where we stand.

So the Holy Spirit as in all the books of Scripture, is the true author. Paul and Timothy are the human authors, Paul primarily, of course, but the Holy Spirit superintending through them to write the perfect word of God.

II. The date. It's quite clear, all scholarship pretty much agrees that this is written about 61 to 62 A.D. during Paul's first Roman imprisonment. He wrote Ephesians and some other books during this imprisonment, and later on he was imprisoned again, but this was about 61 to 62 A.D.

III. The style. The style. This is a very unique book. It's sometimes called the polite epistle. It's just the way Paul is gracious. Oftentimes he would talk about his authority as an apostle. You know, when he wrote to the carnal baby Christians in Corinth, he was really hard to them on some things but not in Philemon. He comes about with this profound and the noblest of Christian spirit. One author said it's the pearl of the most exquisite purity in the treasure that is the New Testament. This small little letter so far surpasses all the wisdom of the world. It's a loving appeal that unfolds like a rose that true great love only known in Christianity. So it's a very unique book from the style and the way the Apostle Paul writes to Philemon, to Apphia, and to the church in his house.

Well, let's go to IV. The audience. Obviously, first on this list would be Philemon. He addresses him right off, "To Philemon our beloved brother." Philemon was Paul's convert. Philemon, it seems, was a married man. He was father of a son and he was quite wealthy. He had a large home and he had slaves. But then Paul continues on not only to Philemon, but to Apphia. Now, Apphia, we are quite certain, was Philemon's wife and this is a household setting so he wanted to send his greeting and address to her. And then

also Archippus. Archippus he calls his fellow soldier. Now, Archippus was most likely the son of Philemon and Apphia, and Archippus was the pastor of this local church that was meeting in Philemon's house. And the reason why we come to these deductions is because it would really make no sense to call these names out specifically unless they were part of the household, because what's happening here? The whole letter, we'll talk exhaustively about this in a moment, is about a runaway slave who left Philemon's household, he has run into Paul, he has been converted to Christ, he has become a great helper to the Apostle Paul, and now Paul is sending him back and this letter is to Philemon and the household, his wife and his son, about how they are to receive this runaway slave back. So that's the only reason I think you could deduct that he would list these names if they were not relatives and members of the same household because the whole household, of course, is involved in this episode of this runaway slave whom Paul is now returning back.

Then we see something very interesting. He continues here, the last part of verse 2, "and to the church in your house." Most scholars completely miss this. Now we know, first of all, it's written about Onesimus returning and being accepted back and not just back to Philemon's house, he has been accepted back into the church as an equal brother in Christ Jesus. No longer as a slave to Philemon, but as a brother; equal again before God in Christ Jesus. So very often scholars will really major on this is one of those unique, very private letters, but, no, it's really not. It's written to the church. Very clearly here, "to the church in his house." It's clearly addressed to the entire church. It's that through this letter, through this episode, rather, of Onesimus being restored back to Philemon, the church is going to watch this new transformed slave, Onesimus, as he comes back. The church is going to watch as he is reconciled back to Philemon. The church is going to watch as now he is no longer just a slave to Philemon, he is now an equal heir of the grace of God with the other members of the church. Galatians 3:28 reminds us there is neither slave nor free man, but we are all one in Christ Jesus.

So the Apostle Paul is writing this to Philemon, yes; to Philemon's wife, Apphia, yes; to Philemon son, the pastor of the local church in his house, Archippus, yes. But also to the whole church meeting in that house because it is an instructive letter that will edify the whole church, and as a matter of fact, it is edifying the whole church even to this day. So Paul sees here his passion for the local church is ever present. He wants God to be glorified as this church experiences the power, the wisdom, and the beauty of the Gospel changing everything, everything that they know.

Now, IV. The setting. The setting. What's all happening here? We've been hitting on that but let's elaborate on that even further. The setting is that Paul is writing this letter to Philemon in efforts to restore Onesimus back in this situation. There is a restoration happening here of a runaway slave who had stolen money from his master, being restored back to his master. Now, isn't it amazing that this Onesimus who had stolen from Philemon, who has run away from Philemon, with over a million people in the Roman empire, somehow stumbles upon the Apostle Paul, and stumbling upon the Apostle Paul, he hears the Gospel and he is converted. And Paul talks about what a blessing he is and his glorious conversion. The Apostle Paul said, "He has been a great help to me." In verse

10 of this book he says, "I appeal," and he is writing to Philemon, "I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment."

So that's part of the setting. That's part of what's happening here, but let's talk a little bit now about Paul's imprisonment. Paul's imprisonment. Three times in this short letter he mentions the fact that he is in bonds; he mentions that he is a prisoner. From Luke's account, we learn that Paul is not in the dungeon beneath Nero's palace, but he's in one of Nero's huts that surrounded the palace. There were an innumerable number of these little shacks all around the Imperial Palace where Nero would house his slaves, his minions, or anyone else that he might deem helpful in his service or in his government. So Paul is under house arrest and he is living in one of those little huts. He is incarcerated there and continually chained to a Roman soldier who is a member of the Imperial guard. What a setting that is. Picture Paul, the scholar and the gentleman. We know he regularly had visitors and guests that would join him for worship and for his teaching, and his condition was most dreadful and miserable.

As a matter of fact, look over with me to 2 Corinthians 11. Would you turn there? 2 Corinthians 11 and let's just look at what Paul says about some of the difficulties he faced in the Gospel ministry. 2 Corinthians 11, beginning in verse 22. Now he is writing in the context of false teachers who have come into the Corinthian church and these false teachers have discredited Paul and exalted themselves, and so Paul is combating that. So he begins in verse 22, "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ?--I speak as if insane--I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?"

So there Paul outlined something of the rigors and the difficulties and the hardships he faced in ministry, and we know that these difficulties had taken their toll on the Apostle Paul's health. He is no longer able to write possibly because of the bracelets, possibly many health issues that he had at this time, but now he dictates his letters to the churches. He would calmly put a word or two in his own handwriting at the end of his letters. You might remember from Galatians 6:11, he says, "See with what large letters I am writing," toward the end, "to let you know this is me, this letter is from me." So here he is in a weakened condition in a prison hut chained to a brawny praetorian, a guy that lounges beside him, and in that setting, Paul dictates to Luke, the trusted physician, word by word, line by line, what is the letter to Philemon which we are studying today.

Now, something else about this setting. I want to say something and I want to spend a little time here, actually, on the ancient culture of slavery. The ancient culture of slavery. It's really very difficult for you and I to grasp a widespread institution of slavery, but it was so very common in the ancient world. As a matter of fact, most every major people group in this day, and much later than this day even, practiced slavery. Now, that's very foreign to us. It's just strange to us. When Brother Steve and I were in India and they had a number of church plant pastors who were introducing themselves, one of the church plant pastors stood up and shared a brief word of his conversion to Christ, and he grew up as a boy as a slave in a Muslim household in India, and that's still quite common among many Muslims in many places around the world. Then he had worked until he had gained whatever place he had to gain to be freed and he was freed and now he is a Gospel ministry. As a matter of fact, today there are still millions of people living in slavery in countries all over the world. We know for a fact in India, in China, in Uzbekistan, in Russia, in the Congo. And I'm telling you, brothers and sisters, those who live under ardent socialism and communism are living as slaves. So don't think this just happened to be something a long time ago, it's still going on today.

Slavery, of course, was different from country to country and from age to age. The Jews had slaves but their laws concerning slavery were much better, much much better than those of like the Greeks and the Romans or the Babylonians or the ancient Egyptians or others. But here in the ancient Greco-Roman culture of Paul's day, slavery was interwoven into every part of the fabric of society whether it be domestic or civic or political. Some scholars estimate 40% of the Roman population were slaves, and even higher in generations before the one Paul is living in and writing in.

Now, slaves could be like a hired employee. It was common to see a slave who could earn income and buy his own property and have his own place to live, not too unlike an employer/employee relationship. But far too often, slaves had no rights whatsoever and they were treated as a piece of property. But let's be reminded that no matter the setting and no matter the age, Christianity is not primarily about social change. It's just not. You can't make the Bible teach that, not primarily. Christianity is primarily about heart change and where there are enough hearts changed by the Gospel, good social change always follows.

Just thinking and doing a little researching, I have some thoughts here I want to give to you, first of all, about our founding fathers here in the United States of America. We know that some of the founding fathers had slaves. We know that some of the founding fathers released their slaves. But here's one thing that is very interesting: these founding fathers designed founding documents that established the Christian principle that all men are equal before God. So they knew they were establishing a document that went against what they lived and what they practiced, and it was those very principles that eventually led to the abolition of slavery in this country. It was the Christian principles that they, themselves, ordained.

We know the first Roman Emperor to embrace Christianity, Constantine in 300 A.D., began reforms to curtail the practice of slavery among his people.

William Wilberforce, you ought to read about William Wilberforce, what a man of God; a devout committed Christian who spent a 30 year political career with a laser beam focus on abolishing slavery in the British Empire. And it took 30 years. When William Wilberforce first started, he was scoffed at and laughed at. He stood all alone, but he kept on and on and on until finally in 1833, the Abolition Act was passed and slavery was outlawed in the British Empire. Why? Christian principles.

We know that Abraham Lincoln and others standing on Christian principles fought to abolish slavery in our country. So while it is true and there is a place for Christian statesmanship and activism and we should be thankful, I personally am deeply thankful for all the work of Martin Luther King because there were Christian principles in this man's life that I don't see very often in the modern civil rights movement. He had principles about forgiveness and overcoming hatred and bitterness while he stood firm on the Christian truth that all men are equal. We ought to be deeply thankful for that balance in that man's life. He wasn't a perfect man but he did a lot of things right and a lot of things good, but I go back to the fact, Christian principles motivated his good work.

So Christianity, again, while it's not primarily about social change, it impacts social change. One thing that you might think about is that Jesus Christ as far as I know from the Gospels, never mentioned the evil of slavery, but he never mentioned a lot of the evils of his day. As a matter of fact, in this day, the child sex trade was rampant and I don't hear any of the early apostles or our Lord mention that evil, and it's because it's not that they didn't stand against it, it's not that they wouldn't teach against it, it just wasn't foundational to Christianity and the Christian cause at that point.

So here we see the Apostle Paul in dealing with this issue with Philemon, and as he dealt with other churches, does not set up a social political movement against slavery. Other Christians may do that but that's not the job of the Christian apostle. Yet he does illustrate in this wonderful beautiful book of Philemon, how the Christian Gospel overcomes the evil of slavery, and that's one of the beautiful messages we will see in this epistle.

Let's be reminded that the Apostle Paul had pledged allegiance to a new King and to a new kingdom. A new King and a new kingdom that is not of this world. And using a social or political system to change the culture is not the style of this new King, and it is not the substance of his new kingdom. Paul's King and Paul's kingdom is altogether different from any other king or any other kingdom of this world. You say, "Well, would God allow an injustice to occur?" Well, be reminded of this fact: Paul's King, Jesus Christ, became the slave of Rome, a prisoner, a prisoner of the Jews and the Romans, and he died in the greatest act of injustice ever recorded in history in order to do the bidding of God. This new kingdom plants a seed, a grain, that given time will grow into a massive tree.

Now, some are critical and they are more activist and they will state, "Well, the apostles failed. They should have formed a public social ministry to abolish slavery." The old mantra that has been around for centuries, "Let justice be done if the heavens fall. Let

justice be done if the heavens fall." Are you sure you want to stand under that banner? Because if true justice, are you hearing me, if true justice is established, then the heavens will fall and every one of us are gone. God in great patience toward all of us unjust sinners holds back his hand of wrath. Thank God for his lovingkindness and his patience toward all of us.

I've said this before but I think it needs to be noted that hate doesn't come in one skin color. There is no excusing the slave trade of the United States. There is no excusing it, there is no explaining away. It's wrong. It's evil. Everything about it is to be condemned, but there were people keeping slaves, getting slaves, mistreating slaves, of every culture, of every people, of every tongue, and of every tribe, and of every nation in that day. There would not have been a slave trade had not Africans enslaved their own people and sold them into slavery. Hatred. Ugliness. Injustice all around.

So if the Apostle Paul was somehow able to start a movement and completely eradicate slavery in the Roman empire, it would have caused such a chaotic mess in the whole empire, and do you know who would have suffered the worst? The slaves. They would have suffered the worst. There is this struggle and, you know, we saw it in the last election, did we not, of, "Well, can a Christian choose the lesser of two evils?" Can I say something to you, friend? You have never made a decision on this fallen earth that wasn't a choice between the lesser of two evils because there is nobody perfectly just. There is no thing perfectly just. When you got married, you chose the lesser of two or three evils. Amen? If you go into partnership with a guy, you might think, "I don't know if I want to go into partnership. Well, he's not perfect." It's always that way. Until we get to heaven, it's going to be that way. Don't come to me with your pious self-righteous, "Well, I would never support that because he's imperfect." Then who are you going to support?

I'm reminded of that time when Jesus was talking about divorce in the Gospels and he said, "What you Jewish men need to understand, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives if you would write them a certificate of dismissal because of the hardness of your hearts." His point was this: you were so cruel and so brutal and so unkind to your wives, even though divorce is unjust and not holy, that's the lesser of the two evils. In this case it would be better for those poor ladies to be released from you than have to stay in that marriage. How are you going to square that, friend, with the lesser of two evils? And Jesus said it wasn't meant to be this way but in a fallen world, you have those complicated issues and you do the best you can with the wisdom you have.

It would not have been better for the slaves to have this immediate, radical elimination of slavery at this time, at least in that age. Jesus said, "You know, sometimes the tares have to grow up with the wheat for a while. You can't just immediately fix it in a fallen world." Just be reminded that if justice is done on the earth, we are all done for.

IV. The purpose. The purpose. The purpose is a beautiful, first of all, a beautiful story of mediation and reconciliation. Not only is Onesimus and Philemon going to be restored, they are going to be restored as equal brothers in Christ. Now, we don't get the final working out but that's the whole implication of the text, that Paul tells Philemon, "You're

receiving back, remember he's not coming back as just a slave, he's coming back as a brother." The Gospel changes everything.

So Paul's purpose here, be reminded, is to deal with a specific issue, in a specific family, in a specific church. The dealing of the slave and master issue in Philemon is not the final word or the final Christian truth on the slavery issue, but remember Christianity is not about lesser things. Let me say that again: Christianity is not about lesser things. Christianity is about freedom from the slavery of sin. It's about freedom from the slavery of self. It's about freedom from the slavery of Satan. It's about freedom from the slavery to death. About freedom from the slavery to hell. And about freedom from the slavery to the grave. And it's to release us from that overwhelming debt we owe to the justice of a holy God.

This is why Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7:21 and 22, "Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave." Here's the beauty and the power of Christianity: Christianity can flourish no matter what condition you find yourself in. Nothing, nowhere, no situation, communism, socialism, democracy, whatever it is, a totalitarian monarchy, whatever it is, Christianity can thrive. Christianity is bigger than that. It's greater than that. It's of another realm. It's of another kingdom. It's of another kind. Paul says very clearly here, "If it's possible, get your freedom. Do what you can to gain your freedom, but don't be overly concerned with changing your place in life. Your lot in life no way diminishes your capacity to serve and honor Jesus Christ." And in our union with Christ, our outer inequalities are compensated. In our union with Christ, all outward inequalities are compensated.

Well, there is going to be this glorious reunion, this reconciliation, that's one of the purposes of a former slave to a former master, now brothers in Christ. Secondly, the higher purpose: the glory of God through the church. Paul's ultimate purpose here, and he reveals that in the earlier part of the text where he says in the last part of verse 2, "and to the church in your house. I'm addressing this to you, Philemon, to your wife, Apphia, to your son, the pastor of the church, Archippus, but to the whole church. I want the whole church involved in this." Paul wants to send Onesimus back to Philemon and bring them out of this master/slave relationship into an equal brother in Christ relationship and he wants the whole church to watch this. He wants the whole church, the entire church, to experience the power, the wisdom and the beauty of the Gospel to reconcile men to God and reconcile man to man. Only the church gets this. Only the church can walk in this. Only the church can experience this. No other segment of culture. Pass all the laws you want, lock up everyone you want, but you can't change the heart of a hater but the Gospel can. The Gospel can. The Gospel can. The Gospel can take a hardened, bitter, prejudiced racist and make him love that very man who is of that race that he at one time hated. That's the glory of God. That's what Paul is going to show us and he wants the whole church to watch it. He wants the whole church to embrace it, that the whole church might be even more deeply convicted, this Gospel changes everything. Whew, hallelujah for the Gospel.

Not only does he want the church to experience it, the power, the wisdom and the beauty of God in changing these things, he wants them to illustrate it. He wants the church to be a theater that the world can look at and see the power of the Gospel. You listen to me, there is no place in this church or any church of the Lord Jesus Christ for one half of one ounce of prejudice and racism. Never! That's a clear pronouncement that the Gospel has not touched your heart. You find you another church if there is an ounce of that in your soul. I'm telling you, I've got brothers and sisters of all skin colors and I love them more than I love a lot of white skinned colored people. Do you know why? I see my Lord in them. Am I clear enough this morning? Let's be the church. You say, "Pastor, you're preaching this like we've got a problem." Not one that I know of but it's going to be like Donkey Kong, one comes up and we're going to hit it right back down. The world has its bigotry. The world has its hatred. The world has its injustices. The world has its inequalities. The world has its prejudices. The world has racism. But the church must not. The church must not.

So we see in the little epistle to Philemon and Apphia and Archippus and to the church that meets in their house, that the Gospel indeed changes everything. It changed a bitter, hateful, cruel, Jewish legalist that hated Christ and hated Christians into a devoted follower of Christ, a preacher of the Gospel of grace and a lover of the church, that's the Apostle Paul. It changed Paul's imprisonment, his enslavement to Rome, from a bitter torment into a blessed assignment from his loving Lord, so much so that he says, "I am the prisoner of Christ Jesus." It changed Onesimus from a thieving runaway slave to a devoted Christian, a companion and blessed helper to the Apostle Paul. It changed Philemon's house. Remember, these are Gentiles. These are Greeks. They know nothing about the Jewish heritage, well, they know something about it but they have rejected everything about God and his revelation through the Old Testament. So it changed Philemon's house from a Gentile dwelling dedicated to pagan idolatry and sin into a worship facility for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It changed Archippus, Philemon and Apphia's son, from what was probably a young man of this world indulging in the lust and perversions of the Ephesian culture, into a preacher, even the pastor of the local church that met in Philemon's house. And we're going to see, by every indication, can't say it dogmatically, by every indication we're going to see that it changes Philemon from a pagan slave owner of Onesimus to receiving Onesimus back not as his slave but as his brother and fellow heir of God through Jesus Christ. The Gospel changes everything. It changes everything.

One quick line and I'm done. Verse 3, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Grace to you. Through grace. It's the Gospel of grace. He says, "I pray for grace to you, for you." Grace means God's unmerited favor. It means you are the object of God's goodwill. God has chosen, in grace, to no longer view you as you rightfully deserve to be viewed. He has decided to view you with favor. Do you realize all the power of God the Father, all the power of God the Son, and all the power of God the Holy Spirit, is focused on you to save you and make you God's own?

Grace to you, and then comes the peace. That follows the grace. Grace comes first and peace from God our Father. He is the author. He is the wisdom behind the Gospel, and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ is the power of the Gospel. He procured it. He accomplished it on the cross.

But my friend, the Gospel changes everything. Everything. And it keeps on changing us and keeps on changing us and keeps on changing us.