The Gospel in Action (Genesis 50:15-21 and Philemon 1-25) 15-Nov-26

Genesis 50:15-21

Joseph Reassures His Brothers

15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if
Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to
him?" **16** So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these
instructions before he died: **17** 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to
forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so
badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father."
When their message came to him, Joseph wept.
18 His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your
slaves," they said.
19 But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? **20** You
intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now
being done, the saving of many lives. **21** So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for
you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

Philemon 1-25

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker— 2 also to Apphia our sister and
Archippus our fellow soldier—and to the church that meets in your home:
3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Thanksgiving and Prayer
4 I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, 5 because I hear about
your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. 6 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. 7 Your love
has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have
refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people.
Paul's Plea for Onesimus
8 Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you
ought to do, 9 yet I prefer to 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— 10 that I
appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in
chains. 11 Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to
you and to me.

12 I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. 13 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. 14 But I did not want to do anything without your consent,
so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be
voluntary. 15 Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while
was that you might have him back forever— 16 no longer as 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 fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.
17 So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. 18 If
he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. 19 I, Paul, am
writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe
me your very self. 20 I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you
in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. 21 Confident of your obedience, I write to
you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.
22 And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to
be restored to you in answer to your prayers.
23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. 24 And so do
Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.
25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

I encourage you to have your **Bibles opened** at **Philemon 1-25.**

There is a sermon outline if you would like to take notes.

Let's pray…

Intro/The Gospel is Personal (vv1-3)

This morning's talk is called "**The Gospel in Action**"

Before we look at how the Gospel is put into action, we had better be clear

about what the Gospel actually is!

[Slide-The Gospel]

The Word **Gospel** – means **Good News**

In the NT the Greek Word for Gospel is **εὐαγγέλιον**

Eu - means Good

Angelion – which sounds like angel (angels are messengers) – **angelion** means **message** or **news**!

So together – it means – Good Message – or Good News

It's also where we get the word **evangelism** from.

So, evangelism is "**speaking the Good News**"

In the New Testament (NT) we have **four Gospels** – four books of Good News – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

They tell us the Good News about Jesus – His birth, life, death and resurrection.

[Slide-Save?]

And they are Good News because Jesus, God's Son, came into the world to **save** us.

But **save** us from what?

We often answer this by saying that Jesus saves us from **sin and death**.

And that's true – but there's actually more to it than that.

[Slide-Save]

What Jesus saves us from is the righteous anger of God against our sin and the judgment that we deserve.

Listen to what Paul says in Romans 5:9 (CEV):

"***Now that God has accepted us because Christ sacrificed his life's blood, we will also be kept safe from God's anger***"

[Slide-God saves us]

The crazy thing is that to be saved from God's anger – God sends Himself – in human form – in Jesus – to save us! That's amazing -isn't it?

[Slide-Repent/Believe]

So, to be saved from God's righteous anger – we need to do **two things** – **REPENT** and **BELIEVE** in Jesus (Mark 1:15)

When I was 9 years old – my primary school teacher took the whole class to see the movie "**The Greatest Story Ever Told**" based on the 4 Gospels.

It had a deep impact on me.

How could the Jewish authorities and the Romans treat such a lovely man like Jesus so badly. I felt so sorry for Jesus!

But a deep impact and feeling sorry for Jesus – is not enough.

[Slide-Personal]

I had to believe the Gospel personally.

I had to admit I sinned – and believe that Jesus died for **MY** sins to be forgiven.

Once I believed THAT – it changed everything!

And that's what this little letter from the Apostle Paul to Philemon is all about!

You see - we can talk about forgiveness, grace and reconciliation until the cows come home. **Talk is cheap**!

But what happens when we actually **put these things into practice as Christians?**

What happens when someone has wronged us or disappointed us or hurt us?

Where does the Gospel fit in then?

Paul's letter to Philemon is a wonderful example of how the Gospel moves from what we believe to how we live.

[Slide-Paul]



V1 – Paul describes himself as a Prisoner of Christ Jesus. In other words he is actually in prison (house arrest in Rome) for teaching people the Gospel Good News of Jesus.

You see **the Gospel is very personal to Paul**. The Good News of Jesus has transformed Paul from a terrorist and persecutor of Christians to a preacher of the Good News to Gentiles (non-Jews). And the Gospel is so personal and so life-changing – Paul can't stop telling people about Jesus – and Paul is prepared to go to prison for Jesus' sake!

But even from prison, Paul does not stop putting the Gospel into action – and he continues to write letters!

Paul includes his brother in Christ, Timothy, as he writes this letter!

And the letter is addressed to Philemon – v1 - (a dear friend and fellow worker) which means Philemon is also a believer in Jesus – and the letter is also addressed – v2 - to Apphia – a sister in Christ – and to Archippus – a fellow soldier – that is a Christian soldier.

We know from later in the letter that Philemon is actually a slave master/owner. Most commentators agree that Apphia is Philemon's wife and she supervises the slaves and Archippus is the son of Philemon and Apphia.

And they have a church in their home in Colossae [the early church consisted of house churches until about 200AD]

And Paul reminds Philemon and his family - v3 – of the ***Grace and Peace – from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.***

It's a personal reminder that because of God's grace (undeserved favour) in sending His Son Jesus to save – people can have peace with God – a peace that is possible – no matter what circumstances people are in – even when chained in prison like Paul.

[Slide-circumstances]

When the Gospel is personal – circumstances don't matter!

The Gospel Transforms Relationships (vv4-7)

[Slide-1st Point]

1st point – **The Gospel Transforms Relationships** – vv4-7

V4 – Paul begins by saying that he is thankful for Philemon and remembers him in his prayers.

It such a privilege to pray for people and such a blessing when people pray for us!

V5 – Paul is specifically thankful because he has heard about Philemon's love for all God's holy people. The Greek word for holy people is ***hagios*** – which is also translated saints – and basically means "set apart".

Once we believe in Jesus – we are set apart as belonging to Him and sanctified (made holy) through our faith – and through the work of the Holy Spirit – and through our union with Jesus. So we all saints in that sense!

Paul is also thankful for Philemon's faith.

You see when we put our faith in Jesus – the Holy Spirit – transforms us.

And that's what's happened to Philemon.

He may be a slave master/owner but now that he is a Christian – it transforms his relationships with people – he shows the love of Jesus to all of God's people around him!

You see – our faith is not meant to be merely private; it is meant to be visible in our actions.

Paul hasn't finished his prayer for Philemon though…

V6 – Paul prays that Philemon's partnership in faith with Paul and Timothy will deepen Philemon's understanding of "every good thing" that they share for the sake of Jesus.

The Greek word for partnership is **koinonia** [see Acts 2:42] which can mean fellowship, sharing or participation. Christianity is not simply an individual relationship with Jesus. **We belong to a family of believers and share together in the blessings of the Gospel. So, here at St. David's we talk about a church family – that's what koinonia is!**

Paul wants Philemon's faith to be active and for him to grow more in love with Jesus and show the love of Jesus more and more to others.

And it's the same for us here at Toukley. That's why our vision is **"to transform the community with the love of Jesus"**

We want the love of Jesus to be contagious!

Paul wants Philemon to appreciate more deeply all the blessings [every good thing] that believers share because of Jesus.

So what is it that we share as believers in Jesus?

- Forgiveness of sins.
- A personal relationship with Jesus
- Salvation through Jesus.
- The certain hope of Heaven.
- Being adopted into God's family.
- The love and fellowship [and blessings] of Christian brothers and sisters.
- The sharing [koinonia] of wealth and material things
- A new identity and equality in Christ.

The common bond of all of these blessings from believing the Gospel – prompts us to respond to the Gospel – and transforms our relationships.

Genuine faith in Jesus produces genuine love for others

That changes everything – we become other-person centred – rather than self-centered.

And that's what Paul is saying in verse 7

Philemon's love that he has shown has given great joy and encouragement to Paul.

For me there's nothing better at Church than hearing how people have shown the love of Jesus to others in our church – a hospital visit – a phone call – a card sent – a meal provided – a kind word said - a prayer offered up – and the beautiful chatter at morning tea! I get so encouraged!

And Paul says to Philemon – whenever the love of Jesus is shown – end of v7 – it refreshes the hearts of the Lord's people!

Challenge: Perhaps we can pray Paul's prayer for our church family to have a deeper understanding of every good thing we share because of Jesus – and pray that we refresh the hearts of our Church family by showing that love of Jesus to each other.

[Slide-2nd Point]

2nd point – **The Gospel Changes How We See People** (vv8-16)

The Gospel Changes How We See People (vv8-16)

Paul has with him a man called Onesimus – who used to be Philemon's slave – and it seems that Onesimus ran away from Philemon and even stole from him. Both offences could result in the death penalty under Roman Law.

Paul says v8 – he could order Philemon to take Onesimus back but v9 – he would prefer to appeal to Philemon on the basis of love. The love of Jesus that they both share.

A loving appeal is much better than an authoritative command!

Paul does all he can to stir up the loving sympathy of Philemon – by playing on the fact that he, Paul, is an old-man and in chains! It's like Paul is saying: "Philemon, before I tell you what I need from you, remember that I'm an old man, and a prisoner at that."

It's a master class in persuasion!

And we see in v10 – that Onesimus became a believer through Paul sharing the Gospel – and so Paul appeals to Philemon – saying in v10 "I appeal to you for my son Onesimus – who became my son while I was in chains"

To Paul – once Onesimus became a believer – it changed how he saw Onesimus. Onesimus is no longer a runaway slave and thief – he is a forgiven sinner – transformed by the Holy Spirit – and is now Paul's spiritual son – and a brother in Christ to other believers.

Paul even uses a play on words in V11

Onesimus' name means "useful"

Paul says to Philemon – v11 - ***Formerly Onesimus was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.***

When Onesimus ran away from Philemon – he was then useless to Philemon. But now Onesimus is a believer – he is useful to Paul – he can run errands for him. And he can also be useful to Philemon – as Philemon's slave helping Paul – Onesimus is still serving Philemon!

And to show exactly how Paul sees Onesimus

He spells it out in v12 – ***I am sending him – who is my very heart – back to you!***

It's like Paul is saying: "*Philemon, I know Onesimus has done you wrong and deserves to be punished. But consider him as though he has my own heart and be merciful to him*."

Paul goes on to say – v13 – he would gladly keep Onesimus with him.

Why?

Well - If Onesimus stayed with Paul

i. He could serve Paul on Philemon's behalf. "Philemon, if you leave Onesimus with me, it's like you serving me, because Onesimus is your rightful servant."

ii. Secondly, if Onesimus stayed he helped a Paul in chains. “Philemon, I know Onesimus might be of some use to you. Yet I am in chains and need all the help I can get.”

iii. Thirdly, if Onesimus stayed he helped a man in chains for the gospel. “Philemon, please don’t forget why I am here in chains. Remember that it is for the sake of the gospel.”

But Paul – v14 – is mindful about being presumptuous and would not do anything without Philemon’s consent and neither would he force Philemon’s hand.

And the clincher is in vv15-16

Paul can see God’s hand in all of this!

Paul says perhaps the reason Onesimus separated from Philemon for a while (which sounds better than ran away) was so that Philemon might have Onesimus back forever – not as a slave – but better than that – a dear brother in the Lord.

You see that’s what the Gospel does.

It gives Onesimus a new identity in Christ – and brings him into a family of believers – where Onesimus is no longer to be seen as a slave but as a brother in the Lord. The Gospel brings forgiveness AND equality.

The Gospel is able to even break through systems of oppression and slavery!

The Gospel changes the way we see people – their identity is no longer defined by their past, their sins, their mistakes or their social standing.

In Jesus, people are no longer simply what they once were; they are our brothers and sisters.

In the same way that - the bad thing that Joseph's brothers did to Joseph in our Old Testament reading – when they meant to harm Joseph – and God used it for good – to save people from starvation and famine.

Likewise - God used the bad thing Onesimus did – stealing and running away from P– to bring about a good thing – Onesimus met Paul – became a Christian – and was transformed!

The Gospel brings good out of the worst situations!

Challenge - How do we see people? Do we see them through the eyes of the Gospel, or do we define them by their past? Have we written someone off? What will we do about that?

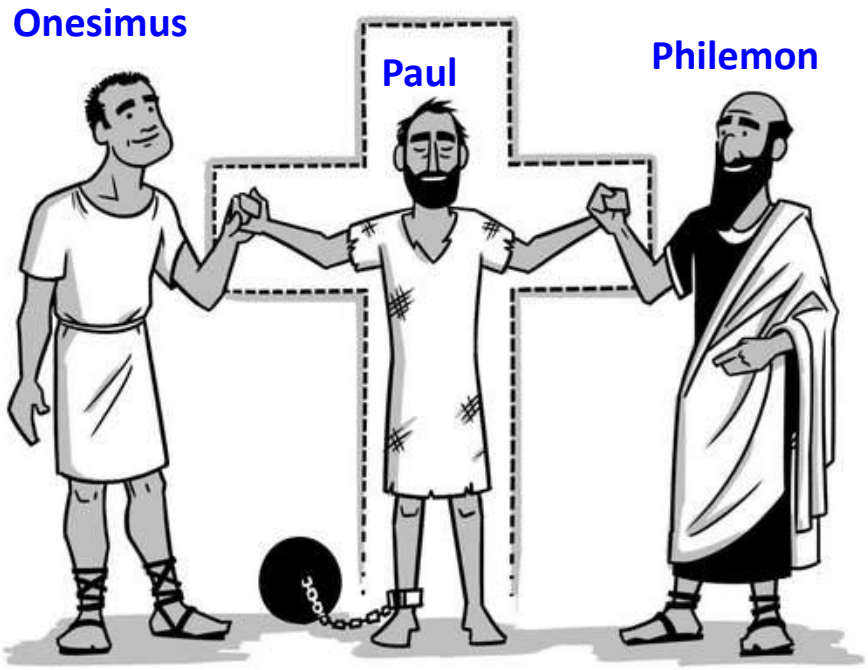
(pause)

[Slide-3rd Point]

3rd point – **The Gospel Calls Us to Forgiveness and Reconciliation** (vv17-21)

The Gospel Calls us to Forgiveness and Reconciliation (vv17-21)

V17 – It's like Paul stands in the middle of Onesimus and Philemon



V17 - Paul asks Philemon to welcome Onesimus as he would welcome Paul. So if Onesimus turns up on Philemon's doorstep – it's like as if Paul is standing there!

Vv18-19 – Paul is prepared to take any punishment or debt that Onesimus owes upon himself. It's like Paul is writing a personal IOU – he's saying "any debt Onesimus owes – put it on my tab!"

This is a beautiful picture of **substitution** – Paul standing in the place of Onesimus.

That's the Gospel in action – sacrificial love!

Isn't that what Jesus did for us – He paid the penalty for our sins. Our debt for our sins was charged to Jesus' account – even though He was sinless and perfect!

And Paul uses another masterclass of persuasion at the end of v19

It's like Paul is saying "Philemon, remember that I have a lot of credit on your account, because you **owe me your very self**." Paul could afford to appeal to Philemon because there was a sense in which Philemon owed Paul his salvation! Not that Paul "saved" Philemon but Paul was God's "instrument" in saving Philemon when Paul told Philemon the Good News of Jesus!

Paul expects the Gospel to produce a practical response from Philemon – v20 – and Paul is confident that Philemon will obey Paul's request – so confident – in fact -– v21 – Paul expects Philemon will do even more than Paul asks.

Isn't that what Jesus teaches in the Sermon in the Mount – ***if someone asks for your shirt, give them your coat – and if someone asks you to walk a mile, walk two!*** (Matthew 5:40-41)

Paul's key point is that Philemon – as a slave master – who has now become a Christian – has been forgiven many things – surely he can extend that same forgiveness to his runaway slave Onesimus.

And besides doesn't Jesus say in Matthew 6:14-15: ***If you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.***

A Challenge for us: Are we willing to extend to others - the same grace and forgiveness that God has extended to us? Is there someone we need to forgive? (pause)

If we think about it; if someone sins against us – we are asked to forgive ONE sin of theirs – whereas Jesus died for us so that ALL OUR SINS are forgiven! How could we possibly refuse to forgive ONE sin from someone else, when all our sins are forgiven!

Challenge: How do we respond when reconciliation is difficult? Are we prepared to take practical steps towards restoring relationships – like Paul does here?

[Slide-4th Point]

4th and final point – **The Gospel is Lived Out in a Community** (vv22-25)

The Gospel is Lived Out in a Community (vv22-25)

As we live out the Gospel – we don't do it in isolation!

V22 - Paul anticipates visiting Philemon – and wants to use his spare room!

V23 – Paul has Epaphras with him – who is a close associate of Paul's and described as a fellow prisoner

And still in v23 – Paul has fellow workers – Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke – who all send their greetings.

The Gospel creates a new family, united in Christ, serving and encouraging one another.

The Gospel creates a community where grace, forgiveness and love are put into practice.

And that brings us back to the heart of this letter – The Gospel is more than a message to be heard and believed – it's a life to be lived!

Conclusion

Let me leave you with these words from **James 1:22**

[Slide-James 1:22]

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

AMEN