

2/26/2023

More than Necessary

Philemon 1:17-22

*From: Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ
To: Philemon and the Church at Colossae
Regarding: Onesimus*

MORE THAN NECESSARY

PHILEMON 1:17-22

Special Music: “The Change in Me”

Casting Crowns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8TCZiy5A2A>

Philemon 1:17-22

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.

EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS

God met a broken man
A torn and fractured clergyman
Lost in the chaos
Of a fractured world
Searching for unspoken words
From a forgotten Creator.
“What makes you so sad
My child?” God asked
“I seem to have lost my faith,”
The man replied,
“And along with it, my soul
As I ride astride
This cyclone of chaos.
God’s been gone so long
I have forgotten his eyes;
The peace
And the grace
His loves provides.”
“But child,
The one you seek is me
And I have never ceased to be
By your side.
It is you that have strayed
And stayed away,
Avoiding your role
As my child.

Rather than doing as asked
You simply refused the task.
If you loved me
You would always do more
Than is necessary.
You would carry the weary,
And lift dreary
Downcast hearts
In search
Of connection
With the Creator of all that is.
Because, if you love me,
You will do more.
If you are thankful,
You will do more.
When you look back
On the broken path
That has brought you here.
You will realize that
You must face your fear
To save others
From the same path.
I am your God,
Exceeding your expectations.
As my child,
I expect the same of you.

I started noticing the trend a couple of years ago, people taking a day off during the week mowing lawns for senior citizens and handicapped persons who were unable to mow it themselves and couldn't afford to have it done. These gracious people would mow these lawns for no charge and no expectation of repayment. They did it because it needed to be done and they wanted to help. They weren't all Christians. They came from all walks of life. Some were wealthy and some were not. As the number of volunteers grew, they also started doing other things as well, like, fixing fences, cleaning up trash, washing home exteriors, power-washing driveways, weed-eating and bush trimming. And there seems to be more and more of these people every day. Some have organized through church or community service groups and others just do it on their own. What is really astonishing about these groups and individuals, is they often go well beyond what is initially asked of them. They don't just do the minimum; they fill the need.

On the other side of that nickel, is the rise in complaints, both to city services and online to neighbors. The people who will say derogatory things like, "Have you seen Mrs. Jenkins yard? It's well over eight inches. The city ought to give her a ticket. I know her husband died six months ago and that she is 87, but that's no excuse. If she can't do it herself, she needs to pay to have it done." These people never seem to take time to ask Mrs. Jenkins if she needs a little help. They often do not realize or care if Mrs. Jenkins must choose between getting the lawn cut or buying groceries each week.

Now, I know that we are looking at the extremes of this type of situation, but I do want you to know that there are plenty of people in our community that could use a little help and are either too proud or too embarrassed to ask. These needs don't have to be tremendously demanding. But God expects for us to make ourselves available to help others.

That is what Paul is telling Philemon in this last section of the Letter to Philemon regarding Onesimus. In verse 17, Paul continues to discuss what we talked about last week.

17 So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.

He's reminding Philemon that he and Philemon are partners in their service. After all, the church at Colossae has helped to support Paul with finances, prayers, and even Onesimus. He is telling Philemon that he considers him a partner and he's quite sure that Philemon considers him a partner, as well. After all, the common goal is spreading the message of Jesus Christ while lifting each other up to the Father. They are bonded in their purpose.

Having reminded Philemon of this bond, He asks Philemon to welcome Onesimus just as if he were Paul himself. We talked about this a little last week. After all, when Philemon sent Onesimus to Rome, he was sending his slave, and now Paul wanted him to welcome Onesimus back as a brother, a companion; no longer a slave but a true brother in Jesus Christ. And not only a brother, but a brother on the same level as Paul.

Then Paul makes a reference (possibly unintentionally) to a New Testament parable that can fly by unnoticed if we read to fast:

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.

Not only does Paul vouch for Onesimus but goes a step further is telling Philemon that he, Paul, will cover the costs for any of the transgressions that Onesimus has cost him. Paul is putting action to his words. He's not saying, "Hey there Philemon, I want you to overlook all of Onesimus's previous wrongs and troubles. I know he probably set you back some financially. Don't worry about it. He's a changed man. I truly believe that. And just to show you how much I put my trust in that, I will cover any financial loss you have incurred in the past, due to his indiscretions."

Where have we heard something this before? How about Luke 10:35?

35 The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

That's right, the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

"But wait right there, Preacher. The victim in the story of the Good Samaritan did not do anything to get himself in the predicament that he was in, he was an innocent man who was beaten and left on the road for dead, and

Onesimus earned a reputation for all the trouble and chaos he caused.” I can’t and won’t argue with you on that. But what I see here is an extreme example of grace. It isn’t even a matter of trust in an individual, but in the model that Christ set for us. We forget about the deeper message that is lost in the story of the Good Samaritan. We appreciate that the Good Samaritan helped the victim in an act of charity, but most of the Jews didn’t suddenly change their misconceptions about Samaritans as a people.

We like to believe we don’t hold any prejudice, that we have overcome that beast in our lives, but mostly we have tucked it away and it can show up at the most inappropriate times. It is a vicious monster to conquer, and it takes laying that prejudice at the foot of the cross and allowing Christ to change us.

I will promise you, when we follow the example Good Samaritan of taking care of people, there will be times when we will get burned. But that is on the other person, not on us. And it had nothing to do with the color of their skin, the length of their hair, the nature of their clothing, or the last time they took a bath. We do what Christ asks of us and He will provide for us as needed.

We need to understand that Paul was asking a great deal of Philemon. He was asking him to put away his prejudices and preconceptions. Put behind him the past mistakes of Onesimus. Forget how much Onesimus may have cost him with his shenanigans. Forget the Onesimus was a slave. Forget the embarrassment that Onesimus may have caused him with his neighbors and friends. And to assimilate him back into his environment as a friend, brother, and companion. The Good Samaritan did not have to deal with the past of the victim

in his story because he did not know the victim's past, just that he needed help. But Philemon is well aware of Onesimus' past, so this was going to be a real challenge for him. This is probably why Paul says that he will cover the cost of any of Onesimus' past mistakes. It is most difficult to build a relationship like the one Paul wants for Philemon and Onesimus if one owes the other so much.

Paul goes on to say:

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.

Not only does Paul have this huge ask of Philemon on behalf of Onesimus, but he is also confident that Philemon will do even more. What does he mean by that? What more could Philemon possibly do, considering the circumstances.

We don't often think of forgiveness as a gate, but it is. And it swings both ways. Sometimes it keeps things in and sometimes it keeps things out. When we do a cursory job of forgiving people, we make sure that we keep the gate between us closed so that they can't hurt us again. I get it. I've done it. Everyone has. I see it all the time. Once trust is broken in a relationship, we want to do the right thing and forgive someone but we don't want to place ourselves in a position that the same person will hurt us again. Just because we forgive them does not mean we trust them. We assume that if someone has broken their trust, they will do it

again even if they're forgiven. And yes, many people do. But when we close the gate and refuse to engage with them again, we lose all influence in their lives.

“What’s wrong with that, preacher? They hurt me and I am not going to let them do it again.” That’s a real slippery slope isn’t it. Especially when it comes to family. We want to help but we are afraid to help. Our human nature whispers in our ears to let us know that that we don’t have to take that kind of abuse. To stress our difficulty, ministers often quote Luke 6:29 concerning this attitude. “If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them.” And while it is scripture and is a quote from Jesus himself, I think we may have overused it and taken away some of its intention. Instead, I’m going to give us all a visual. When that thought of self-protection comes into our heads, I want us to think that we are standing in a dark corner of the Synagogue chamber, dimly lit with torches, where the soldiers are abusing Jesus. We know that it is us that should be the ones taking the blows on our bodies. We flinch and cringe with every snap of whip and slap of a blow and want to avert our eyes. It is too much for us. And when Jesus can, He looks in our direction, blood flowing down His face, and through the tears caused by the pain and agony He tries to catch our eyes to let us know how very much He loves us. He forgives us. Again, that weight seems too much for us.

That is the kind of response that Paul is expecting of Philemon when Onesimus returns to him. That open gate of total forgiveness and the renewal of a true relationship. A Christ-type of forgiveness. A complete forgiveness. The same type of forgiveness that Christ affords us.

“I just can’t do that, preacher.” You’re right. You can’t. It is not within the bounds of human nature. You are going to have to give it over to Jesus so that he can walk you through it. You simply cannot do it on your own. But rather than just quitting and walking away from it, frustrated that you cannot commit, closing that gate so that you don’t have to deal with it, lay that relationship at the foot of the Cross and allow God to work in your life so that you can keep that gate upon and salvage that relationship for everyone involved.

We find ourselves in the Season of Lent. So many people look for something to give up during lent; chocolate, coffee, sweets, whatever. This season is a time when we embrace Jesus spending 40 days and 40 nights fasting in the desert and then facing the temptations of Satan. But I challenge you to think that maybe that time that Jesus spent in the desert, as impossible as it sounds to us, was not about giving up anything at all, but instead embracing God, God’s Love, God’s law, and Jesus’ relationship with His Father. Perhaps we can do the same as we intentionally draw closer to our creator by giving more of ourselves to Him and allowing Him to help us with our own relationships.

God bless you,

AMEN

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