

Worship Wednesday, "Forgiveness"

Wed., 3.4.20

A clean slate...that's what a young man on the run was looking for as he hustled through the Roman Empire looking for cover. Problem was...he was looking for it in all the wrong places. He had left his hometown on the run. He had stolen from his employer because he was sick and tired of being ordered around and so, he just left...EVERYTHING...everyone...everything he had ever known and headed for the big city of Rome. Maybe he could get lost in the crowd there. Yeah, he could start over, blend in, make a new start, yes, have a clean slate. And yet, there was nothing CLEAN at all about what he was doing. He felt dirty and ashamed... He was nothing but a thief and on top of that he was nothing but a common slave. Who was he kidding? A clean slate?

The young man makes it to Rome...where he aimlessly wanders around looking for work, until he finds himself staring at a man who is chained to a Roman soldier. Of all things, he finds a job working for this man who is under house arrest under the order of Rome. A man living in a rented house, chained to a Roman soldier, yet allowed to have people come in and out of a home he's renting. The young man hears that the man in chains is allowed this privilege because he's a Roman citizen. He doesn't really care, he needs the money, and so he runs errands for the man.

The man's name: Paul. Paul of Tarsus. Tarsus? He's never heard of such a place. But, there's something about this man, Paul. He's so settled. Confident. At peace. He's in chains, but he's at peace. I'm free, but I feel like I'm in chains. No peace. No confidence. Just shame.

Day after day, the young man runs errands for Paul and he listens to Paul tell stories of another man from another town he's never heard of...Jesus of Nazareth. It's mind-boggling what he hears. Accounts of this man who performed miracles...healed the sick, fed people with food He created on the spot...feeding thousands with 3 loaves and 2 fish, and then this man was crucified, and yet somehow rose from the dead... It makes no sense...that's impossible. And what's even more impossible is what Paul continues to tell the young man... Paul tells him that Jesus of Nazareth died on the cross and rose from dead FOR HIM...so that he could be forgiven, so that he could have a new start, a clean slate.

In fact, Paul asks the young man day after day: "Would you like to be made clean Onesimus?" That's his name: Onesimus. It means, "useful." What a lie. He doesn't useful...he just feels lost!!

Onesimus tells Paul that he'll think about his offer...really the offer of the Nazarene. And he does. For days...day after day, he goes back and forth from Paul's rented house to the market. He thinks to himself, "Why should I listen to this man...I mean...maybe he really is a fugitive...he's in under arrest by Rome...maybe he's lying to me... But, he doesn't seem to be. He keeps talking about being forgiven. Cleansed. But, I've done so much, SO WRONG. Yet, I must admit...that story Paul tells about the bright light and Jesus speaking to him from heaven...wow...that is hard to believe. But, the strange thing about it is...I believe it.

He's so convincing. I watch how he acts with the soldiers who rotate back and forth and hook up that six-foot chain to him. He's always kind. He's always talking to them about Jesus. What if it's true? What if this Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God? What if He did rise from the dead? If that's really true, then He would have the power to do anything. If He really did rise from the dead, then He would have the power to change me? Is that possible? Could he forgive me? Cleanse me?

Yes, Paul continues telling Onesimus that if I will simply confess his sins to Jesus and be willing to repent...change...Jesus will make him a new person. **Born again**...he calls it. Huh. Born again, thinks Onesimus? Like a baby. Oh, that I could start over again...like a baby. I've made such a mess of things. I miss home! I miss me. I don't even know who I am anymore.

And then the day comes...Onesimus drops off the items from the market and suddenly he stops...and he's just staring at Paul. He can't stand it any longer...there's a nervousness, a scared excitement as Onesimus looks at Paul...and finds himself now on his knees in front of him. The soldier groans... "Oh god of Nero...another one..."

Paul looks at Onesimus and takes his hands and says: "Onesimus is today the day? Would you like to start over? Would you like a clean slate?" Onesimus nods, "Yes! I want to be forgiven! I believe!" And so, in that little house in Rome a runaway slave named Onesimus confesses his sin and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ to save his soul and he was.

And that church family is a depiction of what I believe could have happened to Onesimus and is the potential back-drop to a letter in our Bibles written to a man named Philemon. You say, "Wait a minute...you said Onesimus. I don't remember you saying anything about a man named Philemon." Well, you're right. I didn't. But, the account of Onesimus is depicted for us by way of the New Testament letter to a man named Philemon...the man who was the owner of Onesimus. For you see, Philemon was the man from whom Onesimus had stolen and then left him...running away...as a fugitive to Rome.

Now church family, what I have just shared with you is my depiction of what COULD have happened to Onesimus. The account I described is how I envisioned it all in my mind...trying to think about what led up to Onesimus' salvation. So, I won't stand here and tell you that what I just shared is exactly how it happened...because no one really knows. But, what we do know is there was a man named Onesimus who was from a town called Colossae, who was a runaway slave, who ran into the Apostle Paul, who was in Rome under house arrest and whom the Apostle Paul led to Christ. Onesimus. Yes, all of that is true. All the details as to how it took place? We don't know...yet, we do know this... **Onesimus was born again**. Onesimus was runaway slave and NOW...he needed to go home and make things right with his owner, Philemon.

Enter the letter to Philemon. Turn there in your Bibles. Find the T's in the New Testament and go right and you'll run into the one page, yes, just one page in your Bible named: Philemon. A single page that the Holy Spirit desired for us to be able to read for all time...a page of FORGIVENESS.

Tonight's message is all about forgiveness... **Onesimus was forgiven by the Lord Jesus...but would he be forgiven by Philemon?**

Forgiveness... It's been said that you're never more like God than when you forgive someone. That's true! Forgiveness is so powerful! Forgiveness ends self-pity. Forgiveness grants mercy, Forgiveness comforts, pleads for love, ends vengeance, thwarts Satan and brings joy. That's power brothers and sisters! That's Forgiveness...the heart of the Gospel. Jesus said...

Matthew 6:14-15

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Forgiveness is commanded by our Savior and He can do that, because He forgave us. The Bible is clear:

Ephesians 4:32

³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Think about forgiveness...If Jesus had not chosen to forgive us, and die on the cross for our sins, we would be totally doomed. Yet, it was because of Jesus' sacrifice, taking our place, paying for our sins, that allowed God to forgive us. And what is more, when God forgives, He forgives by forgetting! Think of that...when God forgives, He forgets. He removes our sins as far as the east is from the west, never to be brought up against us again, never to be held against us, never to be used to condemn us EVER AGAIN! Oh, the thought of forgiveness is in the mind of God...is beyond comprehension! And you know what Church Family...that should bring us unspeakable joy! We're a forgiven people and it's that joy that we should be willing to extend to one another by way of forgiveness. And this is the purpose of the letter to Philemon...

We're going to read the whole thing, because it's beautiful...but, we'll do it in pieces... Verse 1...

Philemon: 1

¹ Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker ² and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house: ³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, ⁶ and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.^[a] ⁷ For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you. ⁸ Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, ⁹ yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— ¹⁰ I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus,^[b] whose father I became in my imprisonment. ¹¹ (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) ¹² I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. ¹³ I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, ¹⁴ but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. ¹⁵ For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, ¹⁶ no longer as a bondservant^[c] but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. ¹⁷ So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. ¹⁸ If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. ¹⁹ I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. ²⁰ Yes, brother, I want 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 say. ²² At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you. ²³ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, ²⁴ and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. ²⁵ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.
