

Welcome Home?

by Chris Famisaran

Well, hello, everybody. Good to see you all today. My wife sends her regards. Let us begin with prayer. Father in heaven, thank you for another day of life and the fact that we could be here today, as we open the word door to small book that sometimes we even forget in the Bible, Lord, may its powerful message, Lord, speak to us. cover our hearts and provoke us to move forward. In Jesus name. Amen.

I'm going to tell an illustration. I don't know if I have shared with it before, but it's so good if I did. It's bears repeating again. Jean-Claude Juncker, the European Commission president revealed in an interview once that he keeps a little book of a list of people who have crossed them in the past. Think about his position, European Commission, President that's of significance, right? So he was telling this reporter I know this may sound like a joke, but seriously, one of the most senior officials in the EU walks around with a little book of names of people who have been mean to him. Sorry, I should not be laughing but it's funny. Juncker says in the interview, I have a little black book called Le Petit Maurice, where for the last 30 years, I have noticed somebody who has betrayed me. And he goes on to say an interview that the book isn't really full of... Because people rarely betray me. So to defend himself a little later, he says, I'm not vengeful, I just have a good memory. And the book became so well known during his time as prime minister of Luxembourg, that he would tell people attacking him, Be careful, little Maurice is waiting for you. Oh, my word. Isn't it comforting to know that God doesn't hold our sins against us like Maurice does? Or sorry, Jean-Claude Juncker, but have ultimately been covered by grace.

I'd like to go to a little letter called Philemon. Anybody ever heard a sermon on the letter to Philemon? Yes, okay. I've been waiting to preach a sermon for a while. Okay. But let's go to Philemon. It's a little book. It's Paul's last letter. It's a smallest. If you notice Paul's writings, it starts up front with the biggest letters and then as it goes down, it's covered by the shortest ones. It's a small, small letter, one chapter 25 verses. And I'd like to go to this passage because there's, you know, sometimes little books in the Bible or little letters often get left out, but there's a very powerful message in this little letter. All right, we all there. Okay, so, Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy, our brother, so Philemon, our dear friend, and worker, also to Alfia, our sister and Archippus, our fellow soldier, and to the church that meets in your home, Grace and peace to you from God our Father, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I love Paul's letters are a lot of the letters that you find, especially in the New Testament, their standard written Greek letters you have. You have the writer, for instance, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and you have Timothy, they're going to write a letter to Philemon. Whose Philemon? We'll get to that in a second. Okay? So you have whose the writer, and then you have the address, see Philemon and then it also mentioned Alfia, probably Philemon's wife. Archippus, a fellow soldier, meaning a fellow believer, and then he leaves he begins the letter well, so with grace and peace you from God our Father, which is a standard greeting, and then Paul goes into Thanksgiving. He says, I all Please stand by God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your love for all of his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus, I pray that you are as that your partnership with us and faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. Your love has given me great joy and encouragement because you brother have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people.

Philemon, he's a church leader, I believe in Colossi and you know, Paul, he's giving things he's giving praise for the fact that Philemon has been faithful. They're working together to spread the good news. But there's a little challenge here. Not all is well, in verse eight. Paul is going to make a plea for an individual named Onesimus. Therefore, although in Christ, I could be bold in order for you to do what you ought to do. Yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. What is Paul talking about? It is as none other than Paul and an old man. And now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus that I appeal to you for my son and Onesimus. Who is this Onesimus? And is this really Paul's son? In a way Paul is talking in the figure language of as a father, he's become kind of like a mentor, a father figure. For Onesimus who became my son while I was in chains. Often times, Paul found himself were in jail, okay.

Formerly, he was useless to you. But now he has become useful to both of us. So Onesimus and Philemon, they're connected somehow. Onesimus essentially was a slave of Philemon. But for whatever reason, Onesimus has fled, and eventually found himself with Paul. And so Paul took this Onesimus in began to teach him and Onesimus became... I don't know if he was a believer before or after, but essentially, he became part one of Paul's individuals who helped to share the gospel. But yet, now Paul is wanting to send Onesimus, back to Philemon. How do you think Onesimus maybe felt a little bit at first? No, don't send me back there. I fled from there. But Paul is writing to Onesimus and he's making a plea on behalf of Onesimus for forgiveness, okay. Paul is seeking forgiveness for Onesimus who should be punished legally, if you are a slave and you run away, what could happen? A lot of bad things in a way to Paul is actually kind of he's not only making a plea for Onesimus but also for himself because he's also potentially harboring a fugitive. Hmm. The plot thickens. It says in verse 12, I am sending him who is my very heart back to you when he says, My heart back to you. What is he imploring? What is he implying? He loves this guy, he cares about him, he must be very close. They must be very close. In fact, he says in verse 13, I would have liked to have kept him with me, so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I don't want to do anything without your consent. So that any favor you would do you do would not seem forced, but would be would voluntary. Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a while was that he might have them so that you might have come back forever. No longer as a slave, but better than as a slave, as a dear brother. He's very dear to me, but even dearer to you both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.

Hey so we have to take perspective. What is Paul asking Philemon to fix except one of your slaves that ran away, potentially, I think he may have also taken something from Philemon as well. Okay we we do not believe it believe in slavery anymore. Amen. Okay, we do agree I'm not justifying slavery here. But back in that day, that's what it was. And so when you were a slave, you were indebted to this slave owner. Philemon could have done anything. But yet now Philemon has also become a believer. Should he be owning slaves shouldn't but for whatever reason, he still had slaves. Now. Paul is going to suggest I'm going to send Onesimus back to you. But when Onesimus comes back to you, please, I plead with you don't accept him back as a slave, but as a brother. In fact, Paul thinks so highly of him that he in a way he wants to place Onesimus as somebody to elevate him to be able to help preach and teach just as Philemon has done. Let's put Philemon in a kind of a difficult point because now look, you also have to think about how Paul is doing this. And Paul's very good. Paul doesn't use his as his authority and his status, but bases his argument on love. Okay. Paul, other than Peter is probably the strongest leader in the church, right? And he could have said, I, Paul, order you to take Onesimus back because it's the right thing to do. does Paul do that? He doesn't, he's smart. He bases his request of in fact, he's even smart when he says Where does it say he on verse 14, it says, but I did not want to do anything without your

consent so that any favor you do would not seem forced but have been voluntary. That's smart. If you're a leader, this is leadership one on one right here. He is explaining he's not just telling you, Hey, man, here's a good plan. But he also gives a reason why. Have you ever dealt with a boss who said you're going to do this because I'm the boss. And I said so.

Oh, Gustavo, those of you who are not here present, he may have said something under his breath, which is funny. I'm praying for you, buddy.

And Paul is sharing his heart out. He's taking a risk, by the way, which we're going to come to later. Philemon could have just said no, I'm going to do what I want. Now this letter is here, it must have happened because Onesimus must have gotten back and probably have been received as a brother. In fact, there's another Onesimus and another letter, that if could be the same one, he becomes a prominent member, a leader in the church. In fact, I forgot that Anytime somebody's made, anybody's specifically mentioned, like, the guy whose ear was cut off Malchus. He was just some joe back then. But yet the gospel writers said no, I'm gonna live put his name, insert his name more often than not, is because they became a believer at some point. And they helped move the gospel forward.

Finally, even though you gotta kind of hand it to Paul, where he's good, because he sends this letter with Onesimus and states. Hey, buddy, I want you to accept this guy back. And I want you to do it in love. Not as a slave owner, except him as a brother. And you will be blessed. Oh, and then he continues on. He says so if you consider me a partner, okay, if we're good to go, if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would what? You would welcome me. He's laying it on thick right? If he has done anything to you, that is wrong or owes you anything. Charge it to me. I Paul and writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back. Wow. That's heavy. Okay, so Paul's explaining why this is important. I'm sorry, I forgot to explain this. But the why is super important in anything even Simon Sinek says unless your organization or anything you want to do unless you know why you're doing it, it's a moot point. Otherwise, you're just going to be floundering. You're going to be wondering why.

Paul is taking a huge risk. And Paul is doing this out of love. Paul is taking a huge risk, because not only is he sending Onesimus back, it's a risk because Philemon could respond in a different way. But Paul's also taking a risk when he's guaranteed Onesimus whatever he had done in the past, Paul is taking his own money. Do you ever have you ever vouched for anybody? It went good. Did it always go good? Did it sometimes go bad? Did you ever maybe for instance, you were asked to refer somebody, you gave them a glowing record? And then when they got to that new job, didn't go well? How does that look? Doesn't look good? on your part, right? Paul's taking a big gamble here in a sense, because he hopes everything works out. And he's trusting God that it will happen. But ultimately, Philemon is going to decide how this goes. I'm guessing it went well, because it's letters here. Right? But Paul is seeking forgiveness doesn't use his status or authority. But He bases his argument on love explains why ultimately, he's taken a risk. So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me treat him as you would treat me despite leap and really have a choice. He doesn't I mean, depending on how he wants to play, and he's a leader in the church, mind you. So he's somebody of important, his authority and his reputation is also online. And then Paul continues on, he says, I'll pay back. Not to mention that you owe and then he also has I Paul, I'm writing this with my own hand guaranteeing essentially, that you owe me. Your very sorry, I will pay it back not to mention that you owe me your very self. I don't know exactly where how that fits in. But apparently Philemon, I want to say is indebted but Paul has made a difference in his life somehow.

And then in verse 20, I do wish brother that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord, refresh my heart in Christ, confident of your obedience, I write to you knowing that you will do even more than I asked, you're not just going to welcome him as a brother, you're going to you're going to use him as a key leader. You're going to welcome him back.

And then also in verse 22. On one more thing. One more thing. This is icing on the cake, prepare a guestroom for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers. By the way, I'm confident I'm going to get out I don't want to come over just to make sure everything is good to go. So Paul lays it on really thick. But I think Paul writes this letter because it is so important that you ever been betrayed. Philemon probably felt very betrayed, he took something and not only that he led. So there's a personal but also a legal. There's personal and also legal ramifications to this. I'm guessing Paul does go back. Sorry. Onesimus does go back he is greeted and he is the response is that of love. So what is? What is the takeaway from this? What's the big thing? The Gospel reconciles us all making us brothers and sisters or friends. We're all tied to each other. If we're believers in Jesus, amen. And we should treat each other as such. Are you going to hurt your fellow brother or sister? Your own kin, your own family? Are you going to try to throw them in jail? Because they wronged you? How should we respond with love? Now, of course, there's certain things to that, you know, look, if you're if you're if your brother or sister harms you, that's one thing, okay, you still forgive them. But there may have to be some boundaries along to to protect you. But ultimately, the Gospel reconciles as all Making us brothers and sisters. And this is a quote by the way I forgot. I think it was Fein Stewart, who said it. The Gospel reconciles us all making us brothers and sisters.

There's a story told of a sheep and a pig who had escaped together and the farmer. They he realizes, Oh, they've escaped and together they found a weak rail in the fence. They pressed it and they push it aside and they got out. And so of course, seeing that they have freedom. They run bolted from the field to explore this whole new land. I was certain new surroundings. It didn't take long for the farmer to realize up their gone. And the animals have wandered far not really left much of a trail day soon turned to night and now and after resting fitfully that night he got up the next morning to resume his search. The animals had been gone for over 24 hours and in the afternoon of the second day, he could hear a bleeding a distant bleeding the sound of his sheep, he knew that sheep's voice crying, please, help me. And it was there that he found the sheep along with the pig. Both had fallen into a ditch into a bog. They both become covered in muck and mud, and they were unable to get out. But were the pig had been content to wallow in the mud. The sheep had known to bleat pathetically until the farmer would come and rescue them both to lift them out, and to cleanse them to wash them. And then the farmer said, if you're ever deceived into sin, and overtaken by weakness, do not lose heart. Go and once your compassionate savior, tell him in the simplest of words of the story of your fall, and the sorrow you feel ask him to wash you it wants him to restore your soul for a sheep and a cell fall into a ditch, a sow wallows where the pig wallow is in it. But the sheep bleats pathetically until she is cleansed by her master, be the sheep my friends, be the sheep.

May we seek forgiveness? May we love but also forgive where there has been wronged. Is there anyone right now in your life that you hold a grudge against? Or feel has wronged you in your life? I'm sure all of us could probably think of somebody. It's not hard to find somebody who's probably wronged us. So what's the challenge pastor? I want you to find one person, I want you to seek one person out who has wronged you. And I want you to forgive them. This can be really simple because it could be a simple thing. And it could also be a very hard thing. But I will tell you this if you choose to do the hard thing,

and forgive somebody who has wronged you, and harmed you or wronged you badly I'm gonna go out on a limb and say you will be free from that burden. I was challenged by this a couple of years ago, the person who did the same thing to me and he said, You need to find somebody close to you and forgive them all it was one of the hardest things I ever did. But I will tell you this the piece that finally came over me after that conversation, of being able to share why it hurts so badly. And for them to see and understand. Or maybe they didn't understand. But still say I forgive you was one of the biggest burdens lifted off of my shoulders. grudges. All it is as I've said before, is you drinking poison. Oftentimes, they don't even know that they've harmed you. How many times have you said hey man, do you realize what you did? And they could be totally oblivious. It's not easy to forgive. But I hope and pray that we're you may have been wronged. And even if they don't acknowledge it, forgiveness is not really for them. I mean it is but more importantly it's for you to be free. Amen. So with this lesson, may you be like gonna summarize seek forgiveness where you need to seek forgiveness, or potentially be like Philemon where you need to also forgive,

Father in heaven, Lord, a short passage, but also important for our lives. Help us, Lord, to learn from this lessons that Paul shares with us and to apply it to our lives to seek forgiveness, but also Lord, where we need to grant forgiveness. In Jesus name. Amen.

Grace and peace everybody. Have a great week.