



WEEKLY SERMON

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Message: Book of Philemon - #9

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Text: Philemon Verses 22-25

Life is much like the good and bad sides of nature: We know there are going to be "normal" times and there are going to be "uncontrollable" times. Life can be green and lush and cool one day and without warning scorching and dry the next. It's the nature of life in a fallen world. One of Job's friends, Eliphaz, put it best when he said in Job 5:7, **"Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward."** It is the naive person who is surprised when difficult times come. And it is the wise person who prepares for them so he can stand firm when they arrive. There is only one safe place on earth to live life. There is only one place in which it is possible to stand with confidence against the uncontrollable aspects of life that will inevitably come against us. That place is in God Himself.

In Psalm 91:2, 5-6, **"I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. (5) Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; (6) Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday."** In other words, we know that strong forces are going to come against us in this life, but we do not have to live in fear of them. The person who takes shelter in God - who stands firm in Jesus Christ - will not be moved by anything. His confidence is not in himself but in the God in whom he stands.

The New Testament talks about standing firm in a number of different ways.

Stand single-mindedly. A house divided cannot stand. One foot in God with the other in the world will result in a fall (Matthew 12:25-26).

Stand unafraid. Paul stood with confidence before kings who were against him because he knew God and God's truth were his foundation (Acts 26:22).

Stand in grace. Standing against the troubles of this life on our own merits is a recipe for failure. We can stand in God only because He accepts us by grace (Romans 5:2; 1 Peter 5:12).

Stand in faith. What would be the point of saying we hope in God if we do not have faith in God? We must stand believing that He is our protection (Romans 11:20; 1 Corinthians 16:13).

Stand in the Gospel. Trying to stand with confidence in God without being related to God through Christ is unreasonable. We must stand as partakers of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1).

Stand in liberty. We will never stand if we fall under the condemnation of the guilt of our sins. We must stand in freedom (Galatians 5:1).

Stand against the devil. We must discern the strategies and attacks of the devil (Ephesians 6:11).

Stand in truth and righteousness. We must be free from sin and free from misunderstandings about God and His ways in our life (Ephesians 6:14; 2 Thessalonians 2:15).

Stand in unity. Harmony with others in the church of Jesus Christ is a prerequisite for standing confidently with God's strength (Philippians 4:1).

Stand in the will of God. Obedience to God is foundational to stand confidently in God (Colossians 4:12).

Stand free from the fear of judgment. The Christian stands in God as the friend of God, not the enemy of God (Revelation 6:17).

Stand free in the face of death. This was Paul's message to the Corinthian church in I Corinthians 15:58 when he wrote to them about the resurrection to life of all who are in Christ. **"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."**

We know storms will come, but we have kingdom work to accomplish even as the winds blow strong against us. We are immovable in Christ even as we abound in the work of Christ, because of our confidence in God.

In *His* Amazing Grace
Pastor David Miklas

“The Final Words to Philemon”

Philemon 22-25

INTRODUCTION: In this message we come to the conclusion of Paul’s one chapter letter to Philemon. As we examine these last couple of words – perhaps you are thinking of what value are they? Maybe you are saying, not only are they hardly worth mentioning or reading let alone spending an entire message talking about them. So, why not just skip over them?

However, I remind you in II Timothy 3:16-17 we read, “**All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: (17) That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.**”

That being said, the last words in Philemon are still God’s words and as such deserve our attention and consideration.

In verses 22-25 we read,

“**But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you. (23) There salute thee Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus; (24) Marcus (Mark), Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas (Luke), my fellow labourers. (25) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.**”

I believe God has included these individuals in the text to underscore the fact that God has an interest in people. He is interested especially in those who are in His family, the family of God. **Yes, God is interested in YOU.**

Here Paul is concerned for his spiritual family. These are people that had touched Paul’s life. They have made some kind of impact on Paul.

So, in this concluding message from the book of Philemon we want to find out who these people are, so they may also have some kind of influence upon us.

Here Paul centers his attention on **FIVE** names in particular.

FIRST: There is Epaphras who was a native of Colossi and hence known to Philemon. He was probably the pastor of the church that met in Philemon’s home. In Colossian 1:7 he is described as “**our dear fellow-servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ;...**” In Philemon Paul said, “**salute Philemon**” or in our words say, “**Hello to Philemon.**”

Notice he said that Epaphras was a **fellow-prisoner**. Some believe that he was living with the Apostle Paul in Rome in his house arrest in order to be an encouragement and comfort to Paul.

Someone said this point to consider, “**when you come in contact with another believer and listen to them and then show compassion to them you are cutting their problem in half by bearing their problem with them.**”

Now let me point out something that might just pass you by. In verse 23 we read, “**...my fellow prisoner IN Christ Jesus;...**” Over in verse 1 we read, “**a prisoner OF Jesus Christ.**” Did you notice the difference – in verse 25, “**in Christ Jesus**” and in verse 1 “**of Jesus Christ**”?

In verse 1, Paul was saying his lot in life was divinely appointed, it is “**of Christ**” – that I am where I am. In verse 25 he is pointing out that his lot in life is also divinely directed day by day by God – it is “**in Christ Jesus.**”

Our circumstances and or affections should be viewed in a similar way. **“OF Christ”** has appointed where we are. **“IN Christ”** God has ordained to direct us through the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

That kind of outlook not only initiates the peace from God in our hearts, but it also should be a motivating influence to live for Him as well.

Now to get a sense of who Epaphras was, we need to go to Colossians 4:12 where we read,

“Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”

In your Scofield refence Bible you have a comment made in reference to Epaphras.

“A touching illustration of priestly service as distinguished from ministry of gift. Shut up in prison, no longer able to preach, Epaphras was still equally with all believers, a priest. No person could keep him from the throne of grace, so he gave himself to the priestly work of intercession.”

And when we are in fellowship with God as we should and if God should lay us aside, the ministry of intercession should be ours as well. Epaphras was someone who shared that burden.

Now in verse 24 you find **FOUR** other names mentioned, **“Marcus (Mark), Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas (Luke),”** Two of these were Jews – Mark and Luke, and two were Gentiles, Aristaschus and Demas. I believe they are placed here as they have been to show us that in Christ - both Jews and Gentiles can be placed in the same body. They show us that any and all ethnic groups can be brought together in Christ.

SECOND: There is MARCUS, actually John Mark, the author of the second gospel that bears his name. He was also the cousin of Barnabas the man who accompanied the Apostle Paul on his first missionary journey.

The main issue of Mark’s life, I believe God would have you to see, was that of his interpersonal relationship with others i.e. how he got along with other people. To discover this we need to notice an incident in Acts 15:36-39 where we read about a first-class blow up between two servants of God regarding John Mark.

“And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the LORD, and see how they do. (37) And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. (38) But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. (39) And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;...”

This was a first-class bitter knock down argument over John Mark that caused a split between the Apostle Paul and Barnabas.

As I read this, I recognize that it is sad but true, that even servants of God have at times had a hard time getting along with one another. In the process there is contention, disharmony, anger and bitterness. One member of the family doesn’t speak to another member. Not only are the principals hurt, so are those around them hurt, causing people to take sides which ultimately causes a split.

Now the things I want to underscore here is the Apostle Paul did not allow this problem to lengthen and fester therefore hindering the work of God.

Later on, Paul writes a letter to Timothy where he mentions Mark. In II Timothy 4:11 we read, **“Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.”** It appears that the external problem these two men had ended in reconciliation. That is the way it should always be between these who are in the family of God.

In I Peter 2:9 we read, **“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light;...”** Even though we are God’s special people, we are not exempt from human weakness. We still stumble and fall into sin.

As someone said, **“We are not sinless, but we should sin less.”** But when we do sin and we have conflicts and find ourselves out of fellowship with others in the body of Christ, every effort should be made to resolve any differences we have.

THIRD: There is ARISTARCHUS. Now as you look into the New Testament there are THREE qualities that describe this man that ought to describe us as well.

Number 1: Aristarchus is categorized by a **holy commitment to God**. In Acts 19 it talks about the opposition believers received in the city of Ephesus. Beginning in verse 28 we read,

“And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. (29) And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul’s companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.”

Here Aristarchus made a holy commitment to take a stand for Christ in the midst of a dangerous situation.

Number 2: Aristarchus is categorized by a **holy involvement**.

In Acts 20:3-5 we read, **“And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia. (4) And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus...”**

Then in Acts 27:1-2 we read, **“And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus’ band. (2) And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.”**

Again, not only did Aristarchus have a holy commitment he also had a holy involvement.

Number 3: Aristarchus is categorized by a **holy employment**. In verse 24 he is referred to as one of the **“fellow labourers”**. That is what God’s ministers do - they labor.

In I Thessalonians 5:12-13 we read, **“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; (13) And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves.”**

In Matthew 9:38 Jesus said, **“Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.”**

Those who go into the harvest fields of the world are labourers.

Those who pastor churches are called labourers.

When you get involved in the Lord’s work you are one of the fellow labourers for Christ’s sake.

Now let me call your attention to the last verse of Colossians chapter 4 where these same names from Philemon are also mentioned. Notice verses 10-14.

“ARISTARCHUS my fellow prisoner saluteth you, and MARCUS, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;) (11) And Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me.”

The Greek word for “**comfort**” is “**paragoria**” from which you get the English word “**paregoric**.” A paregoric is a pain killer. Paul is saying here that these men Aristarchus and Marcus are pain-killers in his life. These are the men who take away the pain and ease the burdens in his life.

This is what God wants us to be to others and especially to those who are called to serve the Lord in full-time ministry.

Over my 55 plus years in the Lord’s work, I understand the problems, trials, etc. that goes with the ministry, and believe me, I am ever thankful for those who have in many ways lessened the pain with their prayers, support and labor on my behalf.

Number 4: There is DEMAS. It appears that at one time Demas was a fellow-worker. However, unfortunately when you think of Demas you think of him from what we read of him in II Timothy 4:10, “**For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica...**”

Now, I don’t know what it was about this world that so enticed him. What I do know is whenever you come upon the name of Demas there is a flashing warning light – Demas has lost his effectiveness as far as God is concerned.

Here let me pause and give you a very sobering warning found in I Corinthians 10 where we read verses 10-12,

“Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. (11) Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. (12) Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

Let me remind you, **Angels fell in Heaven; Adam fell in Paradise; Peter fell in the very presence of Jesus.** So God’s word says to us – “**YOU take heed lest you also fall.**”

Number 5: There is LUKE. According to Colossians 4:14 Luke was, “**the beloved physician**” a Gentile Christian doctor and author of the third gospel. He was a frequent traveling companion of Paul, and no doubt he helped care for the apostle’s frequent physical ailments. He was a faithful and loyal friend to Paul even in his final days according to II Timothy 4:11, “**Only Luke is with me...**”

Now in verse 25 we read, “**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.**” By now Philemon was undoubtedly convicted of his need to forgive Onesimus. In case he wondered where he would find the strength to do so, Paul adds these final words. This familiar benediction is really a prayer that Philemon, his household, and the Colossian assembly would receive the grace needed to forgive Onesimus.

Paul realizes that what he asks is not possible in the flesh, because the flesh seeks vengeance. Nor is it possible through the law, because the law demands justice. Although Philemon could not forgive Onesimus in his own strength, through **the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ**, working with his spirit, he could. Paul’s prayer is that Philemon would have the same grace that allowed Christ to forgive.

In conclusion: The book of Philemon ends here, but not the story. How did things turn out? No doubt Philemon forgave Onesimus. It is extremely unlikely that the book would have found its way into the New Testament canon if he had not.

If Philemon had not forgiven Onesimus, including the book in the canon would have left a false impression for all history.

If Philemon were not the godly, virtuous man Paul describes in this letter, there would have been no purpose in the Holy Spirit's adding it to the New Testament. Further, as a part of the canon, this book would have circulated widely in the early church.

If Philemon had not forgiven Onesimus, it is inconceivable that someone would not have objected to including it in the canon. (This circulation would also confirm its authenticity.)

As to the further histories of Paul and Onesimus, Paul was released from prison, as he anticipated as noted in verse 22, and traveled extensively. One of his trips was no doubt to Colossae, where he saw for himself how Philemon had treated Onesimus.

Half a century later the church Father Ignatius, in Smyrna on his way to martyrdom in Rome, wrote a letter to the Ephesian church. In that letter he writes, "**I received your large congregation in the person of Onesimus, your bishop [pastor] in this world, a man whose love is beyond words.**" Could this be the same man? Perhaps not, because Onesimus would have had to be very old. But if so, it would be a fitting conclusion to one of the great stories of the apostolic age.

Forgiveness has a tremendous power to affect the world. God knew it, Paul knew it, and Philemon needed to know it. The Holy Spirit knew that all men and women needed to know it, and that's why this wonderful little letter was included in Scripture. May we take its message to heart.

There is a story in our own century that also illustrates the power of forgiveness. It begins at 7:55 A.M. on Sunday, December 7, 1941. In a daring surprise air raid, the Japanese attacked the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. In less than two hours, 2,403 American soldiers, sailors, and civilians were killed, and another 1,178 wounded. Aircraft losses totaled 188 planes, and much of the United States Pacific Fleet was destroyed or damaged.

The raid was led by a brilliant thirty-nine year old Japanese Navy pilot named Mitsuo Fuchida, whose idol was Adolf Hitler. Although his plane was hit several times by ground fire, he survived the raid. The attack on Pearl Harbor led to the United States' entry into World War II, and ultimately to the devastation of the Japanese homeland by American conventional and atomic bombs.

After the war, Fuchida was haunted by memories of all the death he had witnessed. In an attempt to find solace, he took up farming near Osaka. His thoughts turned more and more to the problem of peace, and he decided to write a book on the subject. In his book, which he intended to call *No More Pearl Harbors*, he would urge the world to pursue peace. Fuchida struggled in vain, however, to find a principle upon which peace could be based. His story is picked up by Donald A. Rosenberger, an American naval yeoman who survived the Pearl Harbor attack. He writes,

[Fuchida] heard two stories about prisoners of war that filled him with excitement. They seemed to illustrate the principle for which he was searching.

The first report came from a friend—a lieutenant who had been captured by the Americans and incarcerated in a prisoner of war camp in America. Fuchida saw his name in a newspaper, in a list of POWs who were returning to Japan. He determined to visit him. When they met, they spoke of many things. Then Fuchida asked the question uppermost in his mind. "How did they treat you in the

POW camp?" His friend said they were treated fairly well, although they suffered much mentally and spiritually. But then he told Fuchida a story which, he said, had made a great impression upon him and upon every prisoner in the camp. "Something happened at the camp where I was interred," he said, "which has made it possible for us who were in that camp to forego all our resentment and hatred and to return with a forgiving spirit and a feeling of lightheartedness instead."

There was a young American girl, named Margaret "Peggy" Covell, whom they judged to be about twenty, who came to the camp on a regular basis doing all she could for the prisoners. She brought things to them they might enjoy, such as magazines and newspapers. She looked after their sick, and she was constantly solicitous to help them in every way. They received a great shock, however, when they asked her why she was so concerned to help them. She answered, "Because my parents were killed by the Japanese Army!"

Such a statement might shock a person from any culture, but it was incomprehensible to the Japanese. In their society, no offense could be greater than the murder of one's parents. Peggy tried to explain her motives. She said her parents had been missionaries in the Philippines. When the Japanese invaded the islands, her parents escaped to the mountains in North Luzon for safety. In due time, however, they were discovered. The Japanese charged them with being spies and told them they were to be put to death. They earnestly denied that they were spies, but the Japanese would not be convinced, and they were executed.

Peggy didn't hear about her parents' fate until the end of the war. When the report of their death reached her, her first reaction was intense anger and bitter hatred. She was furious with grief and indignation. Thoughts of her parents' last hours of life filled her with great sorrow. She envisioned them trapped, wholly at the mercy of their captors, with no way out. She saw the merciless brutality of the soldiers. She saw them facing the Japanese executioners and falling lifeless to the ground on that far-off Philippine mountain.

Then Peggy began to consider her parents' selfless love for the Japanese people. Gradually, she became convinced that they had forgiven the people God had called them to love and serve. Then it occurred to her that if her parents had died without bitterness or rancor toward their executioners, why should her attitude be different? Should she be filled with hatred and vengefulness when they had been filled with love and forgiveness? Her answer could only be, "Definitely not." Therefore she chose the path of love and forgiveness. She decided to minister to the Japanese prisoners in the nearby POW camp as a proof of her sincerity.

Fuchida was touched by this story, but he was especially impressed with the possibility that it was exactly what he had been searching for: a principle sufficient to be a basis for peace. Could it be that the answer for which he was seeking was a forgiving love, flowing from God to man, and then from man to man? Could that be the principle upon which the message of his projected book, *No More Pearl Harbors* should be based?

Shortly after this, Fuchida was summoned by General Douglas MacArthur to Tokyo. As he got off the train at Shibuya station, he was handed a pamphlet entitled, "I Was a Prisoner of Japan." It told about an American sergeant, Jacob DeShazer, who had spent forty months in a Japanese prison cell and who, after the war, had come back to Japan to love and serve the Japanese people by helping them to come to know Jesus Christ.

Fuchida read the story with interest. DeShazer had been a bombardier on one of the sixteen Army B-25 airplanes which, under the leadership of General Jimmy Doolittle, had been launched on 18 April 1942 from the deck of the USS *Hornet* to bomb Tokyo. None of the planes were shot down, but all of them ran out of gasoline before they could be landed properly. The crew of five in the plane in which DeShazer was flying bailed out over occupied China. The next morning, they were captured and incarcerated for the duration of the war.

DeShazer notes that all prisoners were treated badly. He said that at one point he almost went insane from his violent hatred of the Japanese guards. Then one day a guard brought them a Bible. They were all in solitary confinement, so they took turns reading it. When it was DeShazer's turn, he had it for three weeks. He read it eagerly and intensely, both Old and New Testaments. Finally, he writes, "the miracle of conversion took place June 8, 1944."

DeShazer determined that if he lived until the war was over, and if he were released, he would return the United States, devote a period of time to serious Bible study, and then return to Japan to share

the message of Christ with the Japanese people. That is exactly what he did. Great crowds came to hear his story, and many responded to his invitation to receive Christ.

Fuchida was deeply impressed. Here it was again: a second example of love overcoming hatred. He sensed the power of forgiveness to actually change the hearts and lives of people. Excitedly, he sensed that it could be a principle strong enough to be the basis for his projected book. He determined to learn all he could about DeShazer and his beliefs.

At the train station on his way home, he obtained a copy of the New Testament in Japanese. A few months later, he began to read two or three chapters a day in the Scriptures. Then in September 1949, Fuchida read Luke 23. This was the first time he had read the story of the crucifixion.

The Calvary scene pierced Fuchida's spirit. It all came alive in St. Luke's starkly beautiful prose. In the midst of the horror of His death, Christ said, "**Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.**" Tears sprang to Fuchida's eyes; he had reached the end of his "long, long wondering." Surely these words were the source of the love that DeShazer and Peggy Covell had shown. As Jesus hung there, on the cross, He prayed not only for His persecutors but for all humanity. That meant He had prayed and died for Fuchida, a Japanese man living in the twentieth century.

By the time Fuchida finished reading Luke, he had received the Lord Jesus Christ. He did end up writing his book and entitled it From Pearl Harbor to Golgotha. His life verse, which he signed under his every signature, was Luke 23:34: "**Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.**"

Forgiveness has a tremendous power to affect the world. God knew it, Paul knew it, and Philemon needed to know it. The Holy Spirit knew that all men and women needed to know it, and that's why this wonderful little letter was included in Scripture. May we take its message to heart.

There are a number of write-ups of this story. However, I (Pastor David Miklas) had the privilege of hearing the above testimony personally from Mitsuo Fuchida at a Youth Rally in Arlington, VA in the spring of 1963. And yes, I spoke with, shook his hand and had Mitsuo Fuchida autograph my Bible.

If God has spoken to your heart, after reading the sermon "**Final Word to Philemon**" right now talk to God about what He has spoken to you.

Do you have the assurance that one day you will go to heaven? If you have no assurance that you know Jesus Christ, then I trust you will decide to accept Him as your personal Savior. The Bible tells us in

Acts 16:31, "**...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...**"

Romans 10:13, "**For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.**"

This prayer is here for those who need to ask Jesus to be their personal Savior: "**I do want to go to Heaven. I know I am a sinner, and I do believe Jesus Christ died for me. I realize I cannot buy this great salvation, nor can I earn it. Knowing Jesus died on the cross and arose from the grave to pay my sin debt and to purchase my salvation, I do now trust Him as my Savior, and from this moment on I am completely depending on Him for my salvation.**"

If you made the decision to accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, please let me know. Please send an e-mail to pastormiklas@aol.com and I will send you some literature that will help you in your Christian life.

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