

Finding God's Blessing

Opening Prayer

It's good to be with you again. Thank you, Shannon, for your work. And, I want to thank my friend, Reverend Joseph Cohen for connecting us together. Reverend Joseph has been with you for some time now on Tuesday evenings at 7:00pm Eastern time. He also hosts a public access TV show that is produced in White Plains, New York, "New Hope in the Lord" where Christians give their personal testimonies about how God is working in their lives. Reverend Cohen, my wife Noemi and I are part of The Master's Hand Christian Fellowship in New Rochelle New York with Senior Pastor Theresa Noschese.

Prayer:

Message Introduction

We often talk about God's blessing and some have taken this term to mean prosperity while others suggest that it can only be demonstrated through an austere life. But what does it really mean in someone's life to find God's blessing?

Acts 17:26–27 And he made from one *man* every nation of humanity to live on all the face of the earth, determining *their* fixed times and the fixed boundaries of their habitation, **27** to search for God, if perhaps indeed they might feel around for him and find *him*. And indeed he is not far away from each one of us,

Those that seek him will find him

Psalm 50:15 And call me in *the* day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will glorify me."

Those that do his will

Psalm 50:23 He who sacrifices a thank offering honors me, and he *who* orders *his* way; I will show him the salvation of God."

Main Scripture

Philemon 11 Once he *was* useless to you, but now *he is* useful to you and to me,

Blessing An Individual

When people have an encounter with God, their life is changed.

Examples of individuals that were blessed:

Abraham
Gideon
David

But today I want to talk about a little known man by the name of

Onesimus

He is mentioned secondarily in

Colossians 4:7–9 Tychicus, my dear brother and faithful servant and fellow slave in the Lord, will make known to you all my circumstances, **8** whom I have sent to you for this very reason, in order that you may know our circumstances and he may encourage your hearts, **9** together with Onesimus, my faithful and dear brother, who is *one* of you. They will make known to you all the circumstances here.

The KJV translates this introduction of Tychicus as "faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord:" but some more recent translations use "fellow slave in the Lord" which to the Roman mind set, and for the sake of this message, is the way we will read this, "fellow slave in the Lord", but hold this thought for now.

Paul puts Tychicus first and then adds Onesimus but they are both included with a few others as in Colossians 4:11 "the only ones who are fellow workers for the kingdom of God from the circumcision". So we know these were converted Jews and men the church at

Colosse could trust vs. the false teachers Paul had addressed earlier in this letter.

Then we also read in

Philemon 10 I am appealing to you concerning my child whom I became the father of during my imprisonment, Onesimus.

Philemon 15–16 For perhaps because of this, he was separated *from you* for a time, in order that you might have him back forever, **16** no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Philemon 18 But if in anything he has caused you loss or owes *you anything*, charge this to my account.

So we get a picture of Onesimus and his background. Onesimus was a man that Paul met while imprisoned. We don't know if

- Onesimus was imprisoned himself
- or if worked in some capacity for the Romans so had contact with Paul
- or if someone had brought him along during a visit with Paul who, while in chains, was free to receive people during his two years in prison in Caesarea and at his hired house for two years in Rome.

What we do know is that Onesimus accepted Christ and was transformed so much so that he excelled in his service to Paul.

What we also know is that Paul is writing letters to Colosse, Philippi, and Ephesus and in these letters Paul also mentions Laodicea and Hieropolis.

It seems that Paul was well acquainted with these cities and some of the church leaders in them. One commentary suggests that "Probably during the "two years" of Paul's stay at Ephesus, when *"all which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus"* (Ac 19:10, 26), Epaphras, Philemon, Archippus, Apphia and the other natives of Colosse, becoming converted at Ephesus, were subsequently the first sowers of the Gospel seed in their own city. This will account for their personal acquaintance with, and attachment to, Paul and his fellow ministers, and for his loving language as to them, and their counter salutations to

him. So also with respect to "them at Laodicea," (Col 2:1)".

Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 370). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

It also seems that Onesimus was happily serving Paul in Rome but now, somehow, his history with Philemon comes out. Onesimus is a runaway slave. Once Paul is aware of this, it was necessary that Onesimus repair this breach in his life by confronting his owner and slave master Philemon.

Paul now writes this special letter, to the church in this community, but it is mainly a personal appeal to Philemon.

Now let me go back for a minute to Paul's introduction of Tychicus as "fellow slave in the Lord". In Jesus day, and Paul's day, slavery was common and "slaves were deliberately repressed. There were in the Roman Empire 60,000,000 of them, and the danger of revolt was constantly to be guarded against. A rebellious slave was promptly eliminated. And, if a slave ran away, at best he would be branded with a red-hot iron on the forehead, with the letter F—standing for *fugitivus, runaway*—and at the worst he would be put to death by crucifixion".

Barclay, W. (2003). *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (3rd ed. fully rev. and updated, pp. 304–305). Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press.

In their culture, slavery was accepted, and legally enforced. Slavery was a part of the cultural norm and it would not be wrong for a slave owner to discipline his slave, often harshly.

And, here is a great example of the grace of God. "Onesimus, of Colosse ("one of you," Col 4:9), slave of Philemon, had fled from his master to Rome, after having probably defrauded him (Phm 2:18). He there was converted to Christianity by Paul, and being induced by him to return to his master, he was furnished with this Epistle".

Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 436). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

So here is Paul in Rome with Onesimus who by the gospel of the kingdom, we become new creatures in Christ, old things pass away, we are forgiven as it says in

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; the old *things* have passed away; behold, new *things* have come.

The life of Onesimus had been transformed, but in the eyes of the world, he was still a runaway slave. Onesimus could never fulfill his ministry without dealing with his past. For Onesimus, returning likely meant death. It was possible that he could return to service for his old master branded as a runaway as was the custom. Freedom was not a possibility, although it seems that is exactly what happened.

Blessing A Leader

Examples of leaders that were blessed:

Moses
Joshua
Gideon

But today I want to talk about a little known man by the name of

Philemon

As I mentioned earlier, Paul was well acquainted with these cities and some of the church leaders in them. And now he begins this special letter on behalf of Onesimus who he is sending back to his former master. As Paul begins writing, he honors Philemon as a "fellow worker" and, "it has been suggested that Apphia was the wife and Archippus the son of Philemon (and) ... Archippus had seen Christian service with Paul, for Paul speaks of him as his fellow campaigner".

Barclay, W. (2003). *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (3rd ed. fully rev. and updated, p. 314). Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press.

Philemon is a Christian, and Apphia, and Archippus and more than marginal Christians

because Paul is writing also to the "church in your (Philemon's) house".

Let me take a little aside here, because we don't have all of the history around these people and this church, but E. J. Goodspeed suggests that this is the church of Laodicea because of these references, Paul writes "in Colossians 4:17: 'And say to Archippus, "See that you complete the task that you have received in the Lord." ' Now, that instruction comes after a whole series of very definite references, not to Colosse, but to *Laodicea* (Colossians 4:13, 4:15, 4:16). Might not the fact that he appears among the messages sent to Laodicea imply that Archippus must be at Laodicea".

Barclay, W. (2003). *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (3rd ed. fully rev. and updated, p. 308). Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press.

Now, whether this was the Church at Laodicea or Hieropolis or some other Church nearby in that region, after the short introduction, Paul turns his attention to Philemon and the reason for writing the letter. Paul commends Philemon in

Philemon 5 *because I hear about your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints.*

and then says in

Philemon 6 *I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective in the knowledge of every good thing that is in us for Christ.*

Paul makes it clear that the power of the work that God is doing through Philemon is not just about him and his life, it is wrapped up in "the fellowship of your faith". It seems that Philemon was not only a property owner (the church in your house) and a slave owner (of the runaway Onesimus) but it seems that in some way Philemon had begun using his position and wealth for the purpose of the gospel. Philemon was doing the the work of the ministry by opening his house to be used as a church meeting place.

But now, Philemon is confronted with Onesimus who he only knows as a runaway slave that legally belonged to him and likely stole from him to make his escape. Philemon knows Paul and may hear what Paul has to say, but a runaway was a grievous error that could not be tolerated. How would he respond?

So Paul makes his plea in Philemon 8 "*I have great confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper*" and it would be easy for Paul to use his position and prior relationship with them to tell them what to do.

Or, he might react as we do when we read this history of slavery and simply tell Philemon to emancipate Onesimus. But Paul is very careful with his words and makes this bold statement about Onesimus in

Philemon 11 Once he *was* useless to you, but now *he is* useful to you and to me,

Paul wants Philemon to understand the value he places on the new man that Onesimus has become. This is not the man Philemon knows as a runaway slave. So Paul offers to pay back for any wrong done in the past by Onesimus.

But this isn't an empty offer based on a momentary confession of sin by Onesimus. Paul has proven Onesimus as a faithful son and fellow worker in ministry. In this letter, Paul shows us that "Christianity is not trying to help people escape from their past and run away from it; it is aiming to enable them to face the past and rise above it".

Barclay, W. (2003). *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (3rd ed. fully rev. and updated, p. 318). Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press.

Philemon had in his power to prosecute Onesimus and if he had, there would be a great loss to the church. But here is where the blessing of a leader is found, though the history with Onesimus had cost Philemon, there is greater value in the future of who God was making Onesimus to become.

Blessing A Group of People

God has always desired a people, not just one or two, but a godly seed, a holy nation. When we think about groups of people, we naturally think about"

- The Children of Israel
- The Early Church in Jerusalem

But here, we are interested in "the church in their house".

This is the goal, this is God's desire, first that in Christ Jesus we "have become near by the blood of Christ" in

Ephesians 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you, the ones who once were far away, have become near by the blood of Christ.

but for the purpose that we can become "a dwelling place of God" in

Ephesians 2:21–22 in whom the whole building, joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, **22** in whom you also are built up together into a dwelling place of God in *the Spirit*.

A commonly quoted verse would lead us to think that God inhabits our praise. The KJV translation says in

Psalm 22:3 (KJV 1900) But thou *art* holy, *O thou* that inhabitest the praises of Israel.

and other translations like the LEB say

Psalm 22:3 Yet you *are* holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

But here, I think Young's Literal Translation is better for us in

Psalm 22:3 (YLT) And Thou *art* holy, Sitting—the Praise of Israel.

It is an important distinction because God is not doing a dance to our tune. God is God, and His throne is established forever. As Jonathan Aigner put it, "In worship, God is the subject, the great Mover and Shaper, and we are the ones being moved and shaped by God's story".

Aigner, Jonathan, (February 16, 2016). Does God Really Inhabit Our Praises?, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/ponderanew/2016/02/16/does-god-inhabit-our-praises/>.

We, as a body of believers, whether large or small are being transformed by God's presence as we join together in worship. This is a place where the Holy Spirit moves as he did on the day of Pentecost, and in the house of Cornelius.

Conclusion

Review of the main points.

Those that seek him will find him

Psalm 50:15 And call me in *the* day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will glorify me."

Those that do his will

Psalm 50:23 He who sacrifices a thank offering honors me, and he *who* orders *his* way; I will show him the salvation of God."

1. Finding God's Blessing begins with individuals that are forgiven and restored so they can walk in God's blessing.

2. And God's blessing to deliver happens when there is a leader that is blessed and chooses to bless others as Philemon did.

3. And God's great desire is a group of people together that are blessed - a habitation.

The Bishop of Ephesus

It isn't always possible for us to follow the life of people we read about in the Bible but they are real people and the Bible is a record of at least some of the event in their lives. There is though, this extra-biblical account of Onesimus: "Let us move on about fifty years. Ignatius, one of the great Christian martyrs, is being taken to execution from Antioch to Rome. As he goes, he writes letters—which still survive—to the churches of Asia Minor. He stops at Smyrna and writes to the church at Ephesus, and in the first chapter of that letter he has much to say about their wonderful bishop. And what is the bishop's name? It is *Onesimus*; and Ignatius makes exactly the same pun as Paul made—he is Onesimus by name and Onesimus by nature, the one who is profitable to Christ. It may well be that, with the passing years, the runaway slave had become the great Bishop of Ephesus".

Barclay, W. (2003). *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (3rd ed. fully rev. and updated, p. 310). Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press.

So what was the outcome for this church? What we have is the warning to the church of Laodicea in

Revelation 3:17 Because you are saying, "I am rich, and have become rich, and I have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and pitiable and poor and blind and naked,

Invitation - Prayer of Salvation

Pray: If you have been listening and have never accepted Jesus Christ as the Lord of your life, simply say this prayer with me.

"Dear God,
I know I'm a sinner, and I ask for your forgiveness.
I believe Jesus Christ is Your Son. I believe that He died
for my sin and that you raised Him to life.
I want to trust Him as my Savior and follow Him as Lord,
from this day forward. Guide my life and help me to do your will."

I pray this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen."

If you prayed with me, I want to seal that with a short prayer for you.

"Father,

I thank you for these that have accepted Christ today. Lead them by your Holy Spirit to a local Church where they can learn more about you and your plan for their life, In Jesus name, Amen

Closing - Commission Prayer for Christians

Pray: For those of you that are Christians, we have a commission to preach this gospel of the kingdom. Go and read God's promises and make them your own. And, pray with me now.

"Father,

I come to you in the name of Jesus Christ.

Father, I know it is your desire that all would be saved and come to know the truth.

I commit myself to this work of ministry and ask you to order my steps and prepare people by drawing them in.

Prepare moments when I can share the work and love of Jesus Christ with others.

I pray this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen."

Contact Us and Support this Work

For those of you that prayed with me, would you please go to <http://tellone.org> and add a prayer request so that we can connect with you and continue to pray for the fulfillment of God's plan in your life.

End Notes

Thanks to Shannon Davis for this time on <http://omegamanradio.com>.

And thanks to our friend Rev. Joseph Cohen at <http://newhopeinthelord.com>

Eric and Noemi Ross

- Prayer Line Weekdays – 712-432-6100 Code: 35051381 6:00-7:00 am Eastern Time

- <http://tellone.org>
- <http://prayny.org>
- <http://mymarriagementors.org>

Our Church Home is The Master's Hand Christian Fellowship – <http://the-mastershand.org>