

Paul's Letter to Philemon

St Michael's and St John's Church Bible Study 12 May 2021

Aim: To see what inspiration might come from a reading of Paul's Letter to Philemon for addressing the fifth mark of mission ('To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation').

Collect: 'God our redeemer, you have delivered us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of your Son: grant, that as by his death he has recalled us to life, so by his continual presence in us he may raise us to eternal joy, through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen'

I. Modern slavery

II. Domestic slavery in the urban world of Paul

III. Paul's Letter to Philemon (NRSV):

'Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker,² to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house.³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.⁴ When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God ⁵ because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. ⁶ I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ.⁷ I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.⁸ For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty ⁹ yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love-- and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus.¹⁰ I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment.¹¹ Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me.¹² I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you.¹³ I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel;¹⁴ but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced.¹⁵ Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so 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.¹⁷ So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.¹⁸ If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self.²⁰ Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ.²¹ Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.²² One thing more-- prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored 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.'

IV. The story behind Paul's letter

V. The strategy of Paul's letter

VI. The outcome of Paul's letter

VII. Theological evaluation of Paul's letter

VIII. YouTube from Anti-Slavery International: '180 Years in 180 Seconds'

Collect for Pentecost: 'God, who as at this time taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit: grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgement in all things and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen'

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