

“The Hidden Blessings!”—Philemon 15-16

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Hidden Blessings!”, is Philemon 15-16 → *This perhaps is why [Omesimus] was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant 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.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

During the first years of my ministry in a small rural community I watched one of the members of our congregation lose his farming operation. In debt to the tune of millions it seemed that no matter what decision he made it just didn't work for his benefit. Aside from losing the farm which had been in the family for numerous generations, it seemed the hardest part was watching a large city bank take over and all he could do was sit in the house and watch them run the operation day and night, waiting until he would finally have to take his family and leave the house.

He and his family moved to another state near some relatives, humiliated and left homeless as well as feeling like a failure as a provider for his family and as a businessman. About two years following this terribly trying time I

spoke with him only to hear him say, “Pastor, it was the best thing that ever happened to me. I learned that I am not gifted with management or running my own business. God knew what He was doing and I thank Him for it now.” He had a job, new friends in a new church and community, and a family who had discovered the “hidden blessings” in the midst of a messed up situation and the upheaval of life!

You may have heard many similar stories over the years. Tragedy, life changing undesirable struggles, disasters, all revealing “hidden blessings” in the end. It may be your story as well.

In his letter to Philemon Paul was trying to get his friend to see that the situation in which he found himself was actually a “hidden blessing” from the LORD. Here’s the situation behind this letter: Apparently while Paul was under house arrest while in Rome (cf. Acts 21-28) he encountered a runaway slave by the name of Onesimus. Paul used this time awaiting his trial as an opportunity to share the Gospel with people in Rome since he was allowed house guests. Onesimus became a Christian while spending time with Paul in Rome so Paul referred to him as *my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment*. (cf. Philemon 10)

Even though Onesimus would have been useful to Paul in his ministry (cf. Philemon 11,13), he sent him back to his master with this letter because his life

was actually in Philemon's hands as his *bondservant*. Perhaps Paul was thinking of the 10th Commandment which commands us not to covet our neighbors manservant. (cf. Exodus 20:17) In the letter Paul was asking Philemon to view Onesimus' sinful running away as part of God's providence in both of their lives!

However, the hidden blessings for Philemon go much deeper than simply coming to a discovery of God's physical providence in life through sinful tragedy. God's desire is not simply that we "learn our lesson" in life or see His providential hand at work in caring for us physically. While this is His gracious work in your life He wants you to see the true "hidden blessings"—those blessings which come with faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior! Those blessings are the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and new life choices under the guidance of the Holy Spirit!

Yahweh's using life struggles of upheaval proportions throughout the history of His people is nothing new. After all the injustices done to Joseph by his brothers, he could still reconcile with them by forgiving them, saying in Genesis 50:19-20 → *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.* When Haman convinced the King of Persia to exterminate God's people, Queen Esther's uncle suggested that the reason she was chosen to

be his queen was to speak up for the deliverance of God's people. He said in Esther 4:14 → *Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?* When she spoke up deliverance and reconciliation took place. Why this deliverance? So the Christ, the Savior of the all people could come through the remnant of the Jews according to God's promise and faithfulness! It primarily served a spiritual purpose!

Paul told Philemon in our text: *This perhaps is why [Onesimus] was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother.* Paul suggested, based upon the outcome, that God worked in the midst of Onesimus' disobedience for his deliverance and reconciliation spiritually in coming to faith in Christ! The situation actually turned out to be a benefit to Philemon because now he was gaining *a beloved brother . . . **in the Lord*** which would now affect how he would continue to behave as his slave.

It would affect how he would continue to behave as his slave? How? When you come to faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior it affects the life choices and attitudes with which you function in all the vocations you fulfill in life. Paul described how a Christian slave would function in Colossians 3:23-24 → *Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, **but with sincerity of heart, fearing***

the Lord. *Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men .*

. . You are serving the Lord Christ.

Who wouldn't benefit from a worker who is more conscientious about his work, functions with a strong moral integrity, cares for those involved in his work with a Christ-like character? This is exactly the kind of worker employers are constantly trying to develop on their "teams" through education, seminars and incentives. The Holy Spirit creates it through faith in Jesus! Wouldn't you want a Christian who holds himself to a higher standard to work for you as opposed to someone solely looking out for his own interests? This is what Paul meant when he told Philemon that he would benefit *in the flesh* with a slave who was now a *beloved brother* in Jesus! Who you are in Christ will affect all areas of your life!

As Paul urged Philemon to respect Onesimus' conversion and receive him back on the basis of **both** of their relationships to the Lord Jesus Christ, he was asking him to display the grace which Jesus gave him on a daily basis. Even Paul's offer to "charge" him for any debt which Onesimus owes him reflects who we are in Christ. The debt of your sin is huge in the sight of God—even bigger than the "charges" of those who "owe you an apology!" Because it is a "debt" too large for you to pay, **God paid it for you!**

However, this too was revealed as the "hidden blessing" for all people of

all time! God took on human form in the person of Jesus in order to pay the debt of our sin. Even this happened in the midst of sinful situations as the religious leaders tried to get rid of Jesus by putting Him to death on a cross. While they crucified Him Jesus said: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* (cf. Luke 23:34) The blessings of forgiveness and eternal life were hidden in the greatest crime of all time!

The Christian life is not a life of escape but rather a life of conquest, recognizing that there are “hidden blessings” all the time as we depend upon, trust in and love the LORD each day! Paul actually showed Philemon a practical application of the principle expressed in Romans 8:28 → *And we know that in **all things** God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.* (NIV) Recognizing God at work in our lives in the midst all circumstances, we strive to endure patiently in the midst of “injustices” because we *love* the Lord and know that we *have been called according to His purpose* for us in Christ Jesus! Looking to the Lord Jesus in faith we seek the “hidden blessings” which come because of the Person & Work of Jesus Christ for us! Amen.

You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

(Colossians 3:3)

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