

Running, Redeemed, Reconciled, Restored

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[0 : 0 0] But we're going to turn to the scriptures now, and we're going to turn to the Apostle Paul's letter to Philemon. The Apostle Paul's letter to Philemon, which you'll find in page 1000 of the Pew Bibles.

Philemon. So you'll find that. 1 Timothy 2, Timothy Titus, then Philemon, page 1000. And we're going to read the whole letter together.

So let us hear then the Word of God. Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy, our brother. To Philemon, our beloved fellow worker.

And Aphia, our sister. And Archippus, our fellow soldier. And the church in your house. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers. Because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have towards the Lord Jesus and all the saints. And I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.

[1 : 1 1] For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother. Because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you. Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required.

Yet for love's sake, I prefer to appeal to you. I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus. I appeal to you for my child Onesimus. Whose father I became in my imprisonment.

Formerly, he was useless to you. But now he is indeed useful to you and to me. And I am sending him back to you. Sending my very heart.

I would have been glad to keep him with me in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel. But I prefer to do nothing without your consent. In order that your goodness may not be by compulsion, but of your own free will.

For this is perhaps why he was parted from you for a while. That you may have him back forever. No longer as a slave, but more than a slave. As a beloved brother, especially to me.

[2 : 1 9] But how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. If he has wronged you at all or owes you anything, charge that to my account.

I, Paul, write this with my own hand. I will repay it. To say nothing of you owe me your very own self. Yes, brother, I want 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 say. At the same time, prepare a guest room for me.

For I am hoping that through your prayers, I will be graciously given to you. Apaphros, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus sends greetings to you. As so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. And now just a short prayer. Make the book live to us, O Lord. Show us thyself within thy word. Show us ourselves and show us our saviour.

[3 : 28] And make the book live to us. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, friends, I recently had the privilege of hearing the story of a Glasgow man.

Who I would suspect now be in his late 60s or maybe his early 70s. But anyway, this man told me the story of his life. How from the age of 15 he was involved in stealing, thieving, and breaking into shops.

And he also got himself involved in the whole gang culture back in the 1960s. Which brought a lot of violence and heavy drinking into his life. And so with a lifestyle like this, it will not surprise you to learn that very soon he became arrested by the police.

It was a regular occurrence in his life. And subsequently, periods of time spent in prison. Well, during one period in prison in particular, he said, I decided I didn't like that prison very much.

In his own words he said this, I didn't like that prison very much, so I decided to leave early. I.e., he decided to escape. And escape he did.

[4 : 33] But he was soon caught and he was placed in the maximum security wing of another prison. His break for freedom had failed. And only sought to bring further incarceration into his life.

And in the maximum security wing of the prison, Even there his prison liberties were less than they had been previously. But during this time he remembered conversations that he'd had with Christians.

Who told him all about the gospel. Of all that Christ had done for sinners. And so with the time that he had in his hands, He began to think about God. The Lord Jesus Christ.

And forgiveness. And one week after being released from prison, He declared himself to be a Christian. And he went around all his old haunts. All his old cronies.

And he told them that he was now a new creation in Christ. And he was no longer going to live as he had done previously. He was done with the stealing. He was done with the drinking. And he was done with the violence.

[5 : 34] And for the past 45 years, He's continued to grow and mature as a Christian. He's a lovely Christian man. Doing much here in this land for the sake of the gospel.

And also for over two decades, Giving sacrificially of his time, talents and money, To a charity that he set up in a developing country. Giving training, education, dignity, And hope to men and women and boys and girls.

While at the same time, Advancing the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, Whom he loves. It's a wonderful story. A wonderful story of a young man Whose life was going nowhere fast.

A life that was useless. But now because of the grace of God Poured out upon it, A life that was useless Has now become useful.

And as we come to the book of Philemon this afternoon, We find the same grace of God Transforming a man called Onesimus. One who was useless, But now who has been made or has become useful.

[6 : 36] Verse 11. Paul writing to Philemon in regards to Onesimus. Formerly he was useless to you, But now he is indeed useful to you, And to me. Or as the NIV puts it, He has now become useful.

He was useless, But he has now become useful. Well, we will come to this man And how it was that this transformation Was brought about in his life.

But firstly, let's get some background For the context of this letter. It is a letter. The shortest of all the Apostle Paul's letters. Which is a companion to the letter To the Colossians.

It seems that Philemon Was a member of the church in Colossae, Or one of the churches there In that region of the Lycus Valley. Most commentaries have these two books together.

Probably for that reason. But we can see from verse 1 That it is addressed, It is written to Philemon. So it's a personal letter. A personal letter Written by the Apostle to Philemon About this personal matter Of Onesimus.

[7 : 38] And although it was a personal letter About a personal matter, It was still verse 2 To be, I suppose, Heard by the church That met in Philemon's house. Philemon is a Christian man, Verse 1 To Philemon, Our beloved fellow worker.

In fact, Philemon became a Christian Under the Apostle Paul's Preaching and teaching ministry. Verse 19 I, Paul, Write this with my own hand. I will repay it To say nothing Of your owing me, Even your own self.

Paul had never been to Colossae Or the church in that area. And we can find that out From Colossians chapter 2, verse 1. And so it's most probably likely That Philemon became a Christian While Paul was preaching in Ephesus.

Acts chapter 19, verse 10 Says that Paul preached in Ephesus For two years. And during this time, All the residents of Asia Heard the word of the Lord, Both Jews and Greeks.

So perhaps Philemon had been in Ephesus On a business trip. And he'd heard Paul preaching And he'd become a Christian. But anyway, When he came home, He became a willing partner In using his means for the gospel.

[8 : 48] As the church met in his house, Verse 2 As was common at the time, The church met in houses, House churches. Athia, verse 2, Is Philemon's wife. And Archippus Is most probably Philemon's son.

And Philemon used his house And his wealth For the refreshment of the saints. Verse 7 Well, that's Philemon. But what was the occasion Of the reason for Paul writing?

Well, this personal letter Is about this personal matter Of Onesimus. Verse 10 I appeal to you For my child, Onesimus. Now it seems that Onesimus was a slave.

A slave belonging to Philemon. Verse 16 That you might have him back No longer as a slave. The name Onesimus means Useful Or profitable.

But his behaviour Betrayed his name. He didn't live up to his name. He may have been useful by name But he was definitely Useless by nature. He wasn't useful.

[9 : 51] He became worse than useless As he robbed Philemon And he fled. Verse 18 Paul writes If he has wronged you at all Or owes you anything Charge that to my account.

I will repay it. Verse 19 Most probably Onesimus Had stolen money from Philemon And he had fled. But Paul writes That there has been A transformation in Onesimus.

He was formerly useless to you But he has now become useful. Well how had this come about? Well Onesimus was on the run And folks that are on the run Tend to head for big cities In order that they can Mingle in with the crowds So that their anonymity And freedom might be protected.

Someone on the run Here in this land May head for the big city of London But for Onesimus Onesimus His London was Rome And somehow He found his way To the apostle Paul The apostle Paul Was in prison in Rome Now How had that come about?

Did Onesimus Fall into crime In the big city And found himself Imprisoned with Paul? Or did Onesimus Seek out Paul? Most probably Having heard The apostle Paul's name Mentioned In Philemon's house church Or in Philemon's prayers Verse 22 Well however it came about The most important thing is That it did come about Isn't the providence of God amazing?

[11 : 15] Isn't it amazing How in his providence God will use All sorts of Different circumstances All sorts of Different types of situations Good and bad All sorts of Different types of people To accomplish his purposes In someone's life I mean Just think there for a minute There's Onesimus He was living in a Christian home And surely friends Living in a Christian home As Philemon's As the apostle Paul Has described in verses 1-7 Surely living in a home like that He had heard the gospel And he had saw the gospel And who knows Maybe he was running from the gospel But while on the run Onesimus found himself Being pursued Being pursued Not by the police Not by bounty hunters Or the missing persons bureau No Onesimus found himself Being pursued by God Now friends I wonder If I asked you To draw a picture Or imagine a situation Of someone being pursued by God I bet you

This is not what you would Come up with You would maybe Come up with somebody Coming to church Every Sunday And maybe Going to a Christianity Explored course Or reading the Bible One to one with somebody This isn't what you would Come up with Certainly not what I would Come up with But God was pursuing Onesimus And he pursued him All the way to Rome And he sought him out And he found him When no one else could And God brought him To saving faith To salvation In Christ Jesus I wonder Have you ever been Pursued by God Maybe Maybe as you look back Over your life There are a set Of circumstances There In your life A set of circumstances That you would never Have volunteered for But circumstances Nonetheless That you can see God was pursuing you Through Maybe through the death Of a loved one Maybe Maybe Making you think about The things of life And death But as you look back Into that period In your life You can see the hand Of God in it all Pursuing you

Seeking you out And bringing you To Christ Jesus Maybe there's someone Here this afternoon Who finds themselves In that very place Right now Being pursued by God Well if that's you Friend What you need to learn From Onesimus Is this You can't run from God That's what Jonah Found out wasn't it That's also what The psalmist writes In Psalm 139 Where shall I go From your spirit Or where shall I Free from your presence And then if I can Just paraphrase the rest It really says Wherever I go You are there I can't escape you God You can't run from God God was pursuing Onesimus It's absolutely amazing But the second amazing lesson That we learn here From these verses Is that nothing will stop The advance of the gospel I mean there's the apostle Paul He's in chains in prison Yes the apostle Paul's enemy Stomp That's Paul in prison Yes that's him silenced That's his ministry finished But they couldn't have

Shut the apostle Paul up You see friends The man or the woman Who has a mind And a heart To share the gospel They will share it anywhere They'll share it in a bus They'll share it across The garden fence With their neighbours They'll share it With their hairdresser Or their barber They'll share it With the guy Who serves you coffee And Costa Or the checkout operator In the supermarket Where you do Your weekly shop Or on the city centre Streets like Alex Bedford Folks that have a mind And a heart To share the gospel Will share it No matter where they are Or no matter where they are put Even in a Roman prison So there in that Roman prison A place where your freedom And liberty are taken from you Paul shared the gospel With Onesimus And he became a Christian And he now knew New freedom and liberty in Christ And not just that All the relationships now In Onesimus' lives Were changed His life changed

All the relationships In his life changed I want to just take The remainder of our time Just to look at each Firstly Onesimus got a new master He got a new master Verse 11 Him who had been useless Has now become useful Transformation had taken place In Onesimus' life Spiritual transformation That's why the apostle Paul Was sending him back Spiritual transformation Had taken place No longer was he useless But now he was useful Friends Onesimus probably dreamed Of transformation He maybe dreamed of Social or political Or economic transformation Thinking that these things Would change his situation And circumstances But God in a Roman prison Had brought about Transformation in his life That made every other change In his life That he had hoped for Pale into insignificance For none of these Other transformations Could ever deal with The real root of his problem His alienation from God Personal Spiritual transformation

[16:19] Had taken place in his life He was useless But now had become useful That's what the gospel does Isn't it friends? It transforms lives The gospel changes The lives of men But sadly today The lives of men Have tried to change The gospel But that cannot be so The gospel transforms lives If anyone is in Christ They are a new creation And Onesimus needed This spiritual transformation Friends But all of us sitting here In this building today And all of us Outside this building Also need this transformation too It was Martin Luther Who said We are all of us God's Onesimuses We are all on the run From God But that's what the gospel does It transforms The spiritual state of people Making them new creations As they receive Christ Jesus As saviour and lord They get a new master The apostle Paul Right in Colossians chapter 1

Writes this He has delivered us From the domain of darkness And transferred us To the kingdom of his beloved son In whom we have redemption The forgiveness of sins The gospel brings about Spiritual transformation Delivering us from The domain of darkness Into the kingdom of Christ Giving us a new king And a new master The gospel restores Our relationship to our maker Our rightful ruler And rightful master Again Colossians chapter 1 And you who were once Alienated Estranged And hostile in mind Doing evil deeds Christ has now reconciled In his body of flesh By his death In order to present you Holy and blameless And above reproach Before him The heart of the gospel Is all about Spiritual transformation But friends Sadly in many places And In these days Spiritual transformation Is not top of the list In many places And many so called

Christian churches In fact Not only is it not Top of the list It's not even on the list So concerned with this world They devote themselves To political Social and economic Transformation For they believe That that's what The gospel is all about Church of Scotland Moderator Just About 18 months ago Said this The greatest crisis In the history of man Is global warming Can you believe that Global warming Is the biggest threat In human history That every man Woman and child In this world's Greatest need Is for the ice caps Not to melt It's not to have Our sins forgiven And to be Spiritually transformed Can you believe That a So called minister Of the gospel Could even say that Well friends I hope that makes you Totally aware That he is the minister Of a gospel That's not the Christian gospel In fact It's not a gospel At all No friends

Any real genuine Gospel ministry Will have at its heart And primary focus Spiritual transformation Initially And ongoingly Now that doesn't mean That we don't care For the social well-being Of folks We do Here at the Tron Are on a ministry Called the Road to recovery For those who Struggle Struggle with alcohol And drug addiction And other addictions Now our desire Is that Our friends Would get clean From substances But more than that Our desire Is that spiritual Transformation Would take place In their lives And that they Would be clean From sin And I say this Because it's true No for effect I would rather Die drunk And know the Lord Jesus Than to die Fifty years sober And know No Spiritual transformation Is at the heart Of the gospel Of Jesus Christ And spiritual transformation Had taken place In Onesimus' life He was formerly useless But now he had become useful

He had a new master Who had made him A new creation He got a new master But secondly He got a new father In the apostle Paul Look at how Paul Describes Onesimus In verse 10 I appeal to you For my child Onesimus Whose father I became In my imprisonment Paul often speaks About those Who have come to faith Under his ministry In this way Remember Timothy Whom the apostle Paul called His son Now I don't imagine Paul had that much Time to spend With Onesimus But what is evident Is this He had real Fatherly care Real fatherly Tenderness towards him Paul wasn't married He was a blessed man He was not married And so he had No physical children Of his own But he was a spiritual Father to many Showing great care And great concern For their ongoing Spiritual well-being Just look with me How Paul writes About Onesimus Look at verse 10 My child Onesimus

[21 : 21] Again verse 10 Whose father I became Verse 11 He is useful To both you And to me Verse 12 I am sending him Back to you Sending my very heart Sending you my heart I am sending Part of myself When you see him You will see Part of me Isn't that Such lovely Warm Loving Caring Fatherly language And if we're honest Friends It's not the first Kind of things That come to mind When we think About the great apostle We often think About his great mind His great intellect Or his long suffering For the gospel His great courage And boldness At sharing the gospel He was such a Hard man And with traits Like him With traits Like this We would picture him To be austere And distant And to borrow A description From my very posh English friend Edward Lobb We would picture him To be like a man

Who had never had A jam roly-poly With custard In all of his life But this letter Shows the real Fatherly tenderness The real fatherly Love and concern Paul had For Onesimus So warm So loving Verse 16 Such a beloved brother Especially to me But how much more To you Or as the NIV Puts it He is very dear To me But even dearer To you And Paul also shows His responsibility As Onesimus' father Stepping in On behalf of his child Look at verse 18 and 19 If he has wronged you at all Or owes you anything Charge that to my account I Paul write this With my own hand I will repay it Those of you Who are fathers Especially those of you Who are fathers to boys Will know that sometimes You are liable For the damage That your boy has caused Maybe by kicking a Football through A neighbor's window You have to pick up The tab You are responsible For him I suppose I have got

All that to look forward To with my wee son James But as a father You pick up the tab And maybe you You make your son Pay it back Maybe you take a little From his pocket money Each week Maybe you don't do that But that is certainly What I am going to do But what Paul says Is this I will repay it I will gladly repay it And I will be responsible For my child Onesimus It is a small wonder Isn't it That Onesimus Was transformed And rehabilitating Encountering such Christ-like love As this Onesimus got a new Master in God He got a new Spiritual father In Paul And thirdly He got a new Brother in Philemon He got a new Brother in Philemon Onesimus was given A new spiritual Brother in Philemon Paul's interpretation Of Onesimus Onesimus running away Is very gracious And contains the idea That a higher hand Was at work

Paul could see The providential hand Of God Over all The circumstances Of this whole episode Verse 15 and 16 For this is perhaps That's why he was parted From you for a while That you might have Him back forever No longer as a slave But more than a slave As a beloved brother Especially to me But how much more to you Both in the flesh And in the Lord No longer as a slave But a dear brother Friends the gospel Of Jesus Christ Is a great leveler For all men Cutting through Racial Religious Cultural Social And economic Backgrounds The gospel Of the Lord Jesus Christ Cuts the roots Of slavery Paul is saying To Philemon This man is Is now your brother And if that's the case Then he can no longer Be your slave He is your brother Receive him As such Receive him As you would receive me Now friends A runaway slave Could have been killed For the betrayal Though they were

Valor to their master So that wouldn't Normally happen They would be flogged Or punished In some other way But Paul tells Philemon This guy is now Your brother Can you imagine The effect that this had When folks seen What being a Christian Looked like in action Forgiving a thief A runaway And welcoming him As a brother It turns the world Upside down Doesn't it And that is what The gospel Exactly what the gospel Needs to do In all of our lives To make us so distinctive To make us so different From the world Round about us We as Christians Often want to fit in With the world I know I certainly do I always want to be One of the boys But the world Doesn't need us To be one of the boys The world needs us To be different And distinctive The world needs to see The gospel at work in us The gospel is the world's Only hope William Wilberforce Helped bring about The abolition of the slave trade Over 200 years ago

[26 : 23] But friends You know as well as I do That slavery is alive And well today Now why should this be? Well friends That is so because of this The heart of the human problem Is the problem of the human heart The heart of man's problem Is not political Social Or anything else It's man's heart That is the problem Man's heart needs Spiritual transformation You see friends That's why the gospel Is a spiritual force It's not a political force Or a social force It's a spiritual force The gospel addresses Not political problems But the spiritual problem Of our hearts And when addressed The problem is dealt with At the root Making men new Then new relationships Are created And formed The gospel doesn't deal With the weeds Of the human problem By cutting their heads off Any good gardener Will tell you That that won't work The weeds will grow back Bigger And they will grow back

Stronger Instead The gospel deals With the weeds Of the human problem By destroying them At the root At the heart Transforming men's hearts The gospel The gospel of Jesus Christ Makes new creatures Of men and women And boys and girls Bringing spiritual transformation Friends That the world Will be full of wars Injustice Slavery And a whole load Of other manner Of ills The world will be full Of these things Right up until We are in heaven So it's not a political Or social Or any power Or change That our sick world needs But it's the transforming Power of the gospel God pursued Onesimus A runaway And brought him To saving faith In Christ Jesus What about you friend Remember what Martin Luther said We are all of us God's Onesimuses We are all on the run From God The same God

Who pursued Onesimus Maybe pursuing Some of you here This afternoon Don't keep running Because you cannae run For God The same God Who met with Onesimus Can meet with you In this building Here today And when he does The Lord Jesus Christ Will take your sin And all your rebelling And he will say To God the Father Charge that To my account If he has wronged you at all Or owes you anything Charge that to my account I will repay it Not with silver or gold But I will pay it With my very own Precious blood And death That's an irresistible offer Don't you agree?

Let us pray together What an amazing gospel We have Father What an amazing God You are A God A God A God A God A God A God A God A God A God What a God you are.

And we pray, dear Father, that you would continue to pursue us, to pardon us, and put us to good use for the gospel's sake. We ask this in Jesus' name.

[30 : 10] Amen.