

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Orange – Sermon Notes

## Serve Somebody

- In 1979 Bob Dylan wrote a song called Serve Somebody.
  - I discovered this song a couple years ago and I liked the simple truth of the lyrics.
    - Here's a sampling of them:
      - You may be an ambassador to England or France
      - You may like to gamble, you might like to dance
      - You may be the heavyweight champion of the world
      - You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls
      - But you're gonna have to serve somebody
      - Well, it may be the Devil or it may be the Lord
      - But you're gonna have to serve somebody
    - Each verse of the song walks through list after list of different types of people
      - But each list terminates at the same conclusion - you're going to have to serve someone.
    - Whether or not you like his music, you have to admit that Bob Dylan hitting on a truth here.
      - We will all have to serve someone in our lives.
        - Sometimes that rubs us the wrong way.
          - To even acknowledge this truth requires a little humility.
      - Most of us would rather serve ourselves.
        - We would rather be served than to serve someone.
  - The passage that we're in this morning highlights this same truth that Bob Dylan sang about - you're going to have to serve somebody.
    - But maybe not for the reason you think.
  - This morning we're starting a series through the book of Philemon.
  - We as a church are primed for the book of Philemon.
    - If you remember Pastor Tony just concluded our study of the book of Colossians last week.
    - Throughout that study we learned how Colossians and Philemon have a lot in common.
      - Paul wrote both of these books while imprisoned in Rome.
      - Both letters were carried by Tychichus to their final destination.
        - Which as it happens was the same place.
        - Both Colossians and Philemon were intended for the church in Colossae.
      - Many of the names from Philemon also appear in Colossians.
    - But despite the considerable overlap, Philemon is unique in a lot of ways.
      - Colossians contains theological instruction and exhortation for the church.
      - But Philemon is narrow in its focus.
        - Written to a single person.
      - Colossians shares some themes with Ephesians, Romans, and some of Paul's other letters.
      - But Philemon is....*unique*.
        - If Colossians is a shotgun, Philemon is a laser beam.
        - You'll see what I mean as we get going.
        - In contrast Philemon is a letter written with a very specific focus.
          - Paul is trying to accomplish something very specific with this letter.
      - Paul's motivation for writing Philemon actually provides a sort of scaffold or superstructure that will guide how we read this book.

- I'm going to give that motivation to you now so you can keep it in mind as we go this morning.
- Ready?
- In this letter Paul is attempting to persuade Philemon to do something costly.
- He's going to ask Philemon to be sacrificial.
  - I want you to keep Paul's purpose in mind throughout our study of this book.
  - As we go we'll be on the lookout for ways that Paul is crafting his message.
- Now don't hear me say - this letter was only for Philemon and there's nothing we can glean from it.
  - That's certainly not true.
  - Even though this letter was written for Philemon, as we'll see shortly it was intended for the church to hear.
  - And because it was preserved as scripture and delivered to us thousands of years later we need to pay attention to it.
  - Why?
  - Because all scripture is breathed-out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
- So Philemon was for him back then, but it's also for us now.
- Okay - ya'll ready to get started?
  - We'll start by moving through the first three verses.
    - Those verses will lay the groundwork for the rest of the book.
    - They introduce the main characters and set the tone.
  - Starting in verse four we'll note three effects of Sacrificial service.
  - Today's sermon will take us through verse seven.
- Let's read verses one through three and we'll see the first evidences of Paul's attempt to persuade Philemon.

### Philemon 1–3 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup>Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker

<sup>2</sup>and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:

<sup>3</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- So as a reminder - this is a letter.
- Letters have senders and receivers
- Here in verse 1 we have both.
- The first half of verse one is the gives us the senders this letter.
  - This letter is from Paul and Timothy.
  - Paul, listed first, is the primary author.
  - Interestingly he chooses to lead with his imprisonment.
    - In other letters he introduces to himself as an apostle.
    - Bringing some apostolic authority to the rest of the letter
  - Sometimes he calls himself a bondservant.
    - Emphasizing his commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - Sometimes he just says "it's me, Paul."
  - But here he's emphasizing something.
    - He's not defending his authority as an apostle like in Galatians.
  - Rather he leads with his humble position as a prisoner.

- This is the first example of Paul carefully crafting his letter in order to achieve his greatly desired effect.
  - Paul's imprisonment is a subtle reminder of his own sacrifices for the sake of the gospel and should lead Philemon to look on his request with sympathy.<sup>1</sup>
- He's reminding Philemon of his own sacrifice for the gospel.
  - This intro sets the tone of Paul's appeal.
- We see that Timothy is also mentioned here.
  - As with the intro in Colossians, he's affectionately referred to as "our brother".
    - Timothy was with Paul when he wrote it - so Paul mentions him.
  - Given the personal nature of this letter, it's unlikely that Timothy had any hand in its composition.<sup>2</sup>
    - Although Paul may have bounced some ideas off him while writing it.
- And then we see in the second half of verse 1 the list of intended recipients.
  - First we have Philemon.
    - Now, according to the customs of the time, the first person listed as a recipient is the main recipient.<sup>3</sup>
    - It's his name that now appears in the table of contents of our Bibles.
    - He's described as a beloved fellow worker.
      - This is very warm language from Paul.
        - Interestingly Philemon isn't mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament.
          - So we don't have any information about how Paul and Philemon met or how they might have worked together in the past.
        - But the language here and later in the book suggests that they have known each other for awhile.
          - In fact, in a few weeks we'll see that Paul probably played a part in Philemon's conversion.
        - And unlike many others in the Colossian church - it's probable that Paul and Philemon have met in person.
    - Next Paul mentions a woman named Apphia.
      - We have no information about her.
      - But she is thought to be Philemon's wife.<sup>4</sup>
    - And a man named Archippus - who some think is Philemon's son.<sup>5</sup>
  - Because the nature of Paul's ask will affect the family - scholars tend to think that these people are related to Philemon or at least live in his house.
    - But as Pastor Tony mentioned last week, Archippus might also be a leader in the church there in Colossae.
      - We don't really know.
- The final recipient listed is the church who meets in Philemon's house.
  - This gives us a window into Philemon's involvement in gospel work.
    - He opened his home to fellow believers.
      - The early church didn't have sanctioned buildings to meet in.

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 380.

<sup>2</sup> N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 12, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 176. : "Despite this formal mention of Timothy, the letter as a whole is clearly a very personal one from Paul himself, not a joint effort."

<sup>3</sup> Moo, *Philemon*, 382. : "In Greco-Roman letters it is virtually always the first-named individual who is the main recipient of the letter."

<sup>4</sup> Peter Gorday, ed., *Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 311. : "It seems to me that she was his partner in life."

<sup>5</sup> Henry Alford, *Alford's Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Guardian Press, 1976), 430. : "He was perhaps Philemon's son (so Michael, Olsh., al.): or a family friend."

- So Christians relied on a benefactor who had the resources to sponsor and host their regular meetings.
  - For this church in Colossae, that benefactor is Philemon.
  - He's probably wealthy.
  - He might be a person of some civic status in the city.
    - But we at least know that he is the host of a church in the city of Colossae.
- Now the fact that this church appears in the list of recipients indicates something.
  - Paul intends for this letter to be read aloud in front of the whole church.
  - That's why they're listed as recipients.
  - This is super interesting.
  - Like we said earlier this letter is clearly written to affect change in a single individual's life.
    - That individual is Philemon.
    - And yet Paul includes the church in the list of recipients.
- It seems that Paul wants Philemon and *all* his brothers and sisters in Christ to hear the contents of the letter.
  - There's a reason that Paul is intending for this letter to be read aloud to the church.
  - It's part of his larger aim to persuade Philemon to do something.
  - He wants the church to be aware of what he's going to ask Philemon to do.
    - And this tool of persuasion Paul is using is called an *open letter*.
  - People still write open letters today.
    - It's when a person writes a letter to an individual but publishes the letter.
    - The public nature of the communication puts pressure on the recipient to respond.
      - Sometimes the author intends for the public to keep the recipient accountable.
      - Sometimes the purpose of the open letter is more for the watching world than for the stated recipient.
    - Pastor Tony mentioned Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" a few weeks ago.
      - That was an open letter!
- So by including the church that meets in Philemon's home, Paul is leveraging Philemon's community to help him make the right choice.
  - Is this manipulative?
    - Paul seems to think of it as holy peer pressure.
  - Paul is expecting that the church will actually help Philemon be more holy.
    - That's true for us today too.
      - Your involvement in a church will result in your growth towards holiness.
        - That's one of the reasons why God gives us the church.
        - It's a group of people who will help you to look more like Jesus.
        - And it's a group of people that you get to help look more like Jesus.
      - Sometimes this group project is uncomfortable or awkward.
        - Sometimes it's uncomfortable AND awkward.
    - Sometimes people run away from the church because of this.
  - It's certainly easier to withdraw from a community that pushes you to walk in the light.
  - It's "easier" to listen to sermons online rather than risk being hurt or offended by those in the church.
    - But friends, you need to realize that every point of friction;
      - Every moment of discomfort, gives you an opportunity become more like Christ.
- Now I don't want to leave you with the feeling that church is just a sanctification meat grinder.
  - It's not as if only the strong survive being part of a church.
- That's not true at all.
- It's actually the opposite.

- The church is made up of the weak, the broken, the strugglers.
- Christ's bride is comprised of people that Jesus has saved.
  - Which means that everyone in church is a sinner who has been saved by grace.
- And it's inside the church where you will encounter those redeemed sinners displaying that grace.
  - Where else are you going to find a man who uses a week of his vacation time to joyfully serve at VBS?
  - Where else are you going to find people who will sign up to sit in a hospital with a stranger, just because they want to love one another with brotherly affection?
- That sort of loving sacrificial service to others doesn't make sense outside of God's grace.
  - I don't want to get ahead of myself.
    - But loving service like that is what Paul is going to commend here in Philemon.
  - Speaking of Philemon, let's get back to the letter.
- Paul concludes his introduction with his customary wish that "grace and peace" would attend the lives of those reading his letter.
- Then Paul cracks the door open a little bit on his own prayer life.
  - He tells Philemon that he's been praying for him.
- Let's read verses four and five to see what he says:

#### Philemon 4–5 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup>I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers,

<sup>5</sup>because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints,

- This sounds similar to the other letters written by Paul, especially Colossians.
- He frequently talks about his prayers.
  - Paul is always telling people that he's praying for them.
    - I would just like to say - this is a good point of application for us.
    - Paul is setting an example here.
      - It's encouraging to tell people that you're praying for them.<sup>6</sup>
    - Now don't tell someone that you're praying for them if you're not actually praying for them.
      - That's not encouraging, that's lying.
      - But if you do pray for someone, you should tell them!
- What is the content of Paul's prayers for Philemon?
- There are two answers to this question.
- First Paul is thankful for Philemon's love and faith.
  - Paul writes that he's hearing about Philemon's love and faith.
    - Which means that reports are coming to Paul about Philemon.
      - Given that Paul is probably imprisoned in Rome - this is amazing!
        - Colossae is almost fifteen hundred miles away from Rome.
      - Which means that people who know Philemon are telling Paul about him after traveling across the world.
  - People are commenting on Philemon's faith and love.
    - These two things are related.

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<sup>6</sup> Carson, D. A. Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation. 2nd ed. Baker Academic, 2015. 67. : "How much would our churches be transformed if each of us made it to practice to thank God for others and then tell these others what it is about them that we thank God for?"

- Philemon's faith in Jesus Christ propels him to act in love toward the saints.
  - Because of his faith in Jesus, he deploys his resources in service of the saints.
- We already know that Philemon hosts the church's meeting.
  - Not a small task.
- If you've hosted a small group - you know a little bit about this kind of sacrifice.
- Like I said earlier - churches at this time didn't have buildings.
  - The imperial cults often had temples.
    - So if you wanted to go worship the emperor or some other pagan god, you just go to the government sponsored temple.
- But the early church relied on people like Philemon.
- These people gave of themselves and their resources.
  - They allowed it to survive.
- This likely cost Philemon something.
  - Early church gatherings often involved a meal.<sup>7</sup>
    - Which has a cost associated with it.
- The early church was also often looked down upon.
  - So if Philemon did have a position of honor in the city, it might have tarnished his name to be hosting the Christians.
- Why is he doing this?
  - Why is he sticking his neck out?
- He does this because of his faith in and love for Jesus Christ.
- He loves Jesus because Jesus saved him.
  - Jesus took Philemon's burden of sin from him.
    - Philemon is a forgiven man.
      - That forgiveness is not something Philemon could have bought.
      - He's not serving SO THAT he can earn forgiveness.
- Philemon is forgiven because of his faith in Christ.
  - He is a new man!
  - He's free from his sin!
- And when someone experiences this freedom from sin - their lives are different.
  - Their affections change.
  - Their attitudes change.
  - Their actions change.
  - They start to do different things.
- Philemon now leverages his wealth to the glory of the one that saved him.
- And this love for that he has for Jesus spills over into actively loving and serving other people who love Jesus.
- That's what Paul is referring to when he writes about Philemon's love for the saints in verse 4.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jason S. Sturdevant, "Agape Meal," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016). : "Also known as the "love feast," the agape meal constituted the earliest-known ritual among early Christian churches."

<sup>8</sup> Most commentators see this verse carrying the same meaning as Colossians 1:4. Which is to say that Paul is thankful for Philemon's faith in the Lord Jesus and his love for all the saints. Some see a chiasmic structure to the distribution of Philemon's love and faith among Jesus and the saints. See Below:

- We see a similar statement in Colossians 1:4 where Paul writes:

Colossians 1:4 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup>since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,

- Evidently, Philemon's love and faith is characteristic of the whole church.
  - And Philemon's love is expressed through how he serves the church.
- That faith-propelled loving service to the church is what Paul has been hearing about.
  - And Paul is thankful for it.
    - He's thankful for Philemon's Christ-honoring work.
- And we likewise should be thankful for Christ-honoring workers.
- As you take notes this morning - mark that as our first point.
- Sacrificial service in the church causes us to:
  - **Be thankful for Christ-honoring workers**
- Paul is prayerfully thankful for Philemon's vital work for the church.
  - I think its worth taking a moment to reflect on whether we are similarly thankful for Christ-honoring workers.
    - Every week dozens of Philemon's give of themselves to allow for us to gather.
      - We don't have enough time to move through every single team, but I want to highlight one.
    - On behalf of the parents in this room I want to take a moment and publicly thank the children's ministry workers.
      - If they didn't sacrifice their time and energy - my wife and I would have less attention to give to the preaching of God's word on Sundays.
        - You refresh my heart.
      - I'm thankful for ya'll.
  - Now Paul isn't done praying.
    - I mentioned earlier that there are two main things that make up the content of Paul's prayer for Philemon.
      - The first was his thankfulness for Philemon's faith and love.
    - Now in verse six we see the second thing that Paul is praying.
- Let's read verse 6

Philemon 6 (ESV)

<sup>6</sup>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.

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- A    *tēn agapēn*, "love"  
 B    *tēn pistin*, "faith"  
 B'   *pros ton kyrion Iēsoun*, "toward the Lord Jesus"  
 A'   *eis pantas tous hagiois*, "toward all the Lord's people"

Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 388.

- So Paul now turns his attention to the formation of Philemon.
  - Paul is putting forth this idea that Philemon's service to the church is working towards his personal benefit.
- Now the phrasing here might make us think that Paul is referring to Philemon's evangelism efforts.
  - That's generally what we mean when we say "sharing of your faith".
    - You're sharing the gospel with someone.
- But that's a modern phrase.
  - If Paul meant to commend Philemon's evangelism he would have used the greek word for evangelism.
- Instead Paul's words carry an active sense of performing some action.
  - The Christian Standard Bible uses the word "participation" instead of "sharing" there.
- Paul is praying about the activity of Philemon here.
  - He is participating in the activities of faith.
  - He is doing the things that Christians do.
- Philemon is serving the church.
  - Sometimes serving the church is gets a bad reputation.
    - There's this idea that you get used up and spit out.
    - You get nothing in return for your service to the church.
      - But Paul doesn't see it that way.
  - Look again at what he's praying for Philemon:
    - He's praying that Philemon's participation in the faith or his service to the church would
      - *Become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.*
    - Philemon's love toward the saints is developing something in him.
      - He's reaping the benefits of service.
        - He's learning more about his savior as he serves.
- Paul knows that Philemon's service is benefitting not only others - but also Philemon himself.
  - And Paul is asking God that Philemon's service would reveal things to him.
    - Paul seems to think that Philemon's service is capable of teaching him.
    - There are something that you can only learn by doing.
    - Like cracking an egg.
    - Imagine teaching to someone how to crack an egg without letting them try it.
      - You would tell them:
        - Well first you take the egg in one hand (probably your dominant hand)
        - Then you whack the egg on something.
          - The counter, the side of a mixing bowl, whatever.
            - You want to hit it just hard enough to partially break the shell
            - But don't hit it too hard or you'll crush the whole thing.
          - Now once the shell is cracked, you kinda use your thumbs to break open the shell and dump the egg out.
        - Even if the listener is taking notes, they're not really learning anything.
        - Before they can become proficient in cracking eggs, they will need crack dozens on their own.

- You learn a lot when you serve others.
  - When you actually act out the things that the Bible talks about.
- I think sometimes our intuition tells us that the learning happens in this room.
  - When someone is preaching and the people listening are taking notes.
    - But that's not Paul's view.
  - Paul sees Philemon's service as a way to gain greater knowledge.
  - Philemon is learning as he serves.
    - His service is imparting knowledge to him.
    - It's teaching him things.
- What are these things that he's learning?
  - The "full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ".
  - I think another way to say that is this.
  - *Paul is praying that Philemon would learn to be like Christ through his expression of service.*
    - Philemon is probably learning generosity as he provides meals for his fellow believers.
    - He might be learning humility as he serves those who would be considered untouchable.
    - He might be learning to trust his in heavenly father's protection as he houses a church enduring the pressures of false teachers and a suspicious government.
- *See, Paul knows that a healthy Christian grows in Christlikeness by serving Christ's body.*
  - And he prays that Philemon's work would be effective to that end.
- Paul is praying that Philemon would **Grow in Godliness**.
- That's our second point this morning.
  - Sacrificial service in the church causes us to:
    - **Grow in Godliness.**
- Have you seen this play out in your own life?
  - When you put aside your own desires and serve someone else, you're learning how to crack the egg.
    - You're maturing.
  - When you roll up your sleeves to serve the church, you're putting yourself in the sanctification splash zone.
- You're getting experience acting like Christ in the service of Christ's bride.
  - That's what that phrase "for the sake of Christ" is getting at.
  - Jesus sacrificially served his people.
    - He showed us what a servant looks like.
    - And by joining him in that work - we're working for his sake.
  - It's for his sake that we're serving, and it's by following his example that we're growing more like Christ.
- I wonder what you've learned through serving others.
  - I wonder what spiritual fruit has been borne in your life from serving the church.
  - I'm sure in a room like this there are tons of testimonies from those who have served the body faithfully for years.
- And there are probably others who don't have that testimony.
  - There may be others who have yet to experience such fruit.

- I wonder if you feel like your walk with the Lord has stagnated.
  - Maybe you're nailing your Bible reading and prayer times.
    - But you're wondering - "what am I missing?"
  - If you feel stuck like that - ask yourself this:
    - Am I consistently serving the Lord by serving his church?
    - Am I subjecting myself to the Lord's instruction by serving his people?
      - If you're looking for the next step on the path of spiritual maturity, and you're not already serving in the church - I encourage you to start there.
- Friends, you've never met a mature believer who doesn't serve others.
  - That's what Paul is praising Philemon for.
- Now - is there a way to serve that doesn't lead to an increase in Christlikeness?
  - Yes of course.
    - It's possible to be chronically spread too thin; it's possible to be burned out.
    - It's possible to serve while also grumbling about serving.
      - I have been there.
      - I have grumbled about the inconvenience of serving.
    - I have served with the hope of gaining recognition from others.
  - I have been like the Pharisees that Jesus talks about in Matthew 6:2.
    - He criticizes them for seeking the praises of men in their shows of righteousness.
      - You know what he tells them?
        - They have received their reward.
        - Their reward is a moment of praise.
    - Friends, let's seek a better reward.
      - Let's seek a reward that we can carry into eternity.
  - Now I want to take a moment and address those who are struggling to serve.
    - I'm not here to hit you with the book or shame you.
    - We all have times when we're barely keeping our heads above water with the demands life.
      - I get that.
    - There are times when schedules shift in ways that reduce your capacity for service.
      - If you're caring for elderly parents,
      - Or you just welcomed another child into your home.
      - Or you're in an especially grueling season in school.
      - Or maybe you're recovering from a medical procedure.
    - There are times when you must budget your time differently in light of life circumstances.
    - But I want to *gently* ask you to be honest with yourself.
    - If you realize that you're not engaged in serving, ask yourself — why?
    - Are your life circumstances *actually* preventing you from loving the church with your actions?
      - Friends, if you're opting out of serving due to preference, you're choosing against what Paul prays for Philemon.
    - Don't leave an opportunity to **Grow in Godliness** on the table.
  - Let's serve the church that we might have full knowledge of every good thing in us for the sake of Christ.

- I want you to notice something else that Paul is doing in this verse.
  - Paul is dropping a hint to Philemon.
- Remember our superstructure?
  - The lens that we're reading this letter through?
  - Paul is going to ask Philemon to do something hard
  - Something that will cost him.
  - And this letter is crafted with an aim to persuade and exhort Philemon.
    - So when Paul says "I pray that your participation in the faith would become effective for the FULL KNOWLEDGE of every good thing"
      - It seems like he's saying that Philemon doesn't have full knowledge yet.
      - It seems like he's saying - "there's an aspect of Christlikeness that you don't understand fully, because you haven't practiced it yet."
    - There is something lacking in Philemon's effort for the gospel.
      - An hole in Philemon's gospel-oriented sacrifice.
    - It's like Paul is quoting Jesus speaking to the rich young ruler.
      - When the rich man affirms that he's kept the law, Jesus said to him:
        - "One thing you still lack."<sup>9</sup>
  - But Paul doesn't tell him what he lacks.
    - He's not quite ready to make his request of Philemon.
  - Instead he reminds Philemon about the effects of his service on others.
- Let's look at verse 7.

#### Philemon 7 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup>For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

- After implicitly speaking to the benefit that Philemon himself will receive from his own love and service.
- Paul observes the benefits that sacrificial service has on others.
  - Paul is noting that sacrificial service **benefits other believers**.
  - That's our final point this morning.
    - Sacrificial service in the church causes us to: **benefit other believers**.
- Starting with himself, Paul says that *just hearing* about Philemon's service has produced joy and comfort in himself.
- Faithful Christian service is a joy to behold.
  - Have you ever experienced joy from watching a brother or sister love someone else?
  - In a way when believers serve people, it's like watching Christ serve people.
    - That's what a Christian is anyway - a little Christ.
      - Paul is reminded of Jesus when he sees Philemon's faithful service.
  - Philemon could have easily used his status and wealth to secure power.
    - He could have made others serve him.
  - Jesus spoke of such people in Matthew 20:25.
    - He said:

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<sup>9</sup> Luke 18:22 (ESV) <sup>22</sup>When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

Matthew 20:25 (ESV)

<sup>25</sup>But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

- Philemon easily could have asserted his authority, lording his power over the church.
- But according to Paul he is better described by what Jesus says next.
- Jesus continues and says:

Matthew 20:26–28 (ESV)

<sup>26</sup>It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,

<sup>27</sup>and whoever would be first among you must be your slave,

<sup>28</sup>even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

- Friends, listen to me.
- The ultimate reason why we serve and really why we grow more Christlike when we serve is because *Jesus was a servant*.
- The God of the universe, the creator of all things, the one who holds all things together stooped low.
- Philippians says that Jesus

Philippians 2:7–8 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup>but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

<sup>8</sup>And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

- In a total role reversal - Jesus - the master of the universe humbled himself to serve others.
- He lived a perfect, sinless life.
- He was put to death on a cross.
  - He received the wrath that God has towards those who reject him.
  - That holy and just wrath is what we deserved for the sins that we commit.
- Like a servant carrying a load he bore

Isaiah 53:4–6 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup>Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

<sup>5</sup>But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

<sup>6</sup>All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

- Jesus served us in his death
- He served us.
- Is this something you believe?

- If you are listening to me right now, and you have not trusted in Jesus - the time is now.
  - Put your faith in Jesus Christ.
- And when you put your faith in Christ, and you begin to sacrificially serve like he did
- Your efforts begins to have an outsized effect on others.
- Paul says that his joy and comfort was a secondary effect of Philemon's service to others.
  - He's not even the one being directly served and he's still feeling the benefits.
- Those who *are* the focus of Philemon - Paul says their hearts are being refreshed.
- This verse reminded of something I read in a book about missions last year.
  - I got to this part about how churches should serve the missionaries they financially support.
    - The author gave this example of a group of people from his church in Washington D.C. going to Central Asia to help out while the missionary facilitated a training.
    - They went to serve in whatever way they could.
      - You know what they ended up doing?
        - Childcare.
        - The author writes about the experience saying:
          - "It wasn't especially exciting or fun. The meeting place was run down. But one afternoon a missionary couple came to me almost in tears. They had just figured out that the person sitting on the dusty floor playing with their two-year-old and changing diapers all day was a White House official. Say what you want about worldly power and importance. For this missionary couple the idea that someone on a first-name basis with the US president would use vacation time to serve them so humbly was a huge encouragement."<sup>10</sup>
- How might we refresh the hearts of the saints?
  - How might we serve others so that joy and comfort is produced in those who *just hear* about what we do?
  - Maybe think about those questions with someone over lunch or dinner today.
- I want to end by saying that this whole letter and this whole sermon would fall flat if Philemon hadn't actually been faithfully serving.
  - If Paul was exaggerating Philemon's work to pressure or flatter him
  - This letter wouldn't be worth talking about.
    - In fact, if Paul were just trying to throw his weight around or prey upon Philemon's ego, we shouldn't care what Paul has to say about anything!
  - Paul isn't lying or overstating Philemon's service.
  - He's not manipulating.
  - He's not flattering.
  - He's reminding Philemon of how God's grace has changed his life.
  - He's charting the trajectory of Christlikeness in Philemon's life.
    - Paul is testifying to Philemon's character.
    - He's calling out the precedent of righteousness that he sees.
    - He's expressing his **thankfulness for Christ-honoring workers**

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<sup>10</sup> Andy Johnson and David Platt, *Missions: How the Local Church Goes Global*, 9Marks: Building Healthy Churches (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 94.

- He's pointing out that if someone wants to **Grow in Christlikeness**, they've got to serve somebody - just like Bob Dylan said.
- And he's highlighting how such service **benefits other believers**.
- And next week we'll see him urge Philemon to not cut that work short.
- For the entirety of this sermon I've avoided divulging what Paul is going to ask Philemon to do.
- So what is this costly act of service that Paul is going to request of Philemon?
- I'm going to take a page out of Pastor Tony's book and say - come back next week, and I'll tell you.
- Let's pray together.