Lownes Free Church Sunday Morning – November 11, 2018

The Book of Philemon

Battleground for the Clash of Kingdoms

***Part One: The Battle for the Heart***

When we pray, “Thy Kingdom Come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” do we realize that those two requests are really similar? The Kingdom of God already has come with the appearance of King Jesus. What remains is the subduing of all else to Him. 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Psalm 110:1; Daniel 7:14, 27; Revelation 11:15.

But before Jesus destroys evil armies and dethrones rebellious kings, He first must conquer our hearts! He does this, not as the Lion, but the Lamb, dying for sinners, and encouraging His followers to take up their own crosses and follow Him, laying down their lives for others. But how does that work in practice? The Book of Philemon shows us, as Paul seeks to reconcile a newly converted runaway slave to his wronged, believing master.

The Praise, vv. 1-5 (Kingdom good comes from God.)

“*I thank God for the love you show others because of your faith in Jesus!”*

Godly love is neither a free-floating emotion nor the fruit of a human attachment. Love is what we do when we are loved, and specifically, loved by God. God’s love is not reactive emotion, but a creative force, replicating itself in the life of the believer (Romans 8:28, 29). Paul will be asking Philemon to demonstrate his love in a practical and self-sacrificial way. He knows that the degree to which Philemon will respond will be because of his faith in Christ. 1 John 3:16; 4:7-12, 19-21

*Practical Principle: Strong love grows out of strong faith. Galatians 5:6*

The Prayer, vv. 6, 7 (The King works in us for others.)

“*I ask God that what He has planted in you will bear even greater fruit!*”

We often pass over words like these as if they were mere holy cliches, but Paul understands that the Christ life is a supernatural life that goes above and beyond humanitarianism. Paul has experienced Philemon’s loving faith in action, and is praying (as he writes) that that process will continue and even expand.

*Practical Principle: Loving faith is nurtured by prayer. Philippians 1:4-9*

The Plea, vv. 8-25 (We are to model the King’s compassion.)

“*I ask you to receive this offender you as you would receive me.*”

This letter is personal, a model for motivating another person to do what is right. It is not that Paul is “tactful” (which he is), but that he brings to bear the spiritual realities Philemon has embraced. Paul doesn’t just ask for a favor, but rather for Philemon to act out his faith in love. Is it asking a lot? Compared to what? Your own life? The forgiveness of your sins? Paul’s approach is grace, not coercion.

Foundation of the plea:

Not my authority, but my weakness and imprisonment. vv. 8, 9

Not the old order, but spiritual life and new possibilities. vv. 10, 11

Perspectives on the plea:

For my part, I’m doing what is right, leaving the rest to you. vv. 12-14

For your part, perhaps you can enjoy this new relationship. vv. 15, 16

The plea itself:

As a partner in ministry, I ask you to receive him as you would me. v. 17

As a man, if necessary, I promise to make good any losses. vv. 18, 19

As a believer, I’m asking a free favor that will bring me joy. vv. 20, 21

As a subject of your prayers, get my room ready; see you soon! v. 22

As a reminder, no pressure, but everyone knows about this. vv. 23-25

*Practical Principle: Biblical love flows from “free bondage” in Christ.*

Kingdom Challenge: Do I treat others as free in Christ Jesus?

How would you describe the “pressure” Paul is bringing to bear in his plea?

If you were Philemon, how would you respond? Why is it difficult to let people choose without our trying to force or coerce them to do something?

Why does Paul write this as a semi-public letter? What obstacles might Philemon face in forgiving Onesimus? How could mentioning Mark help Paul’s case?

How free are we in Christ? How does Jesus describe freedom in John 8:31-36? Paul in Romans 6:15-23? Is there any absolute freedom? Why or why not?