

4 addresses on Bible Characters

Part 2

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Note: This text is a computer generated transcript of the sermon. In some cases it may contain errors.

[00:00:00] Wollen Sie bitte umdrehen?

Zuerst einmal zum 2. Korinther 5. 2. Korinther 5, Vers 14 2. Korinther 5, Vers 14 2. Korinther 5, Vers 14 [00:01:01] 2. Korinther 5, Vers 14 2. Korinther 5, Vers 14 2. Korinther 5, Vers 14 Ephesians, Kapitel 4, Vers 28.

Lasst ihn, der gestohlen hat, kein Stahl mehr, sondern lasst ihn lieber Arbeit, mit seinen Händen das, was gut ist, arbeiten, das er vielleicht geben muss, dem, was er braucht. Kolossians, Kapitel 4, Vers 7 All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother and a faithful minister [00:02:06] and fellow servant in the Lord, whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate and comfort your hearts with Inesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here.

And then lastly, the epistle to Philemon.

Philemon, Vers 10 I beseech thee for my son Inesimus, whom I have forgotten in my bonds, [00:03:03] which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me, whom I have sent again. Thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels, whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel. But without thy mind would I do nothing, that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly. For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever, not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord. [00:04:01] If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. If he have wronged thee, or oweth thee aught, put that on mine account.

In meditating upon some of the many bible characters included the text of the word of God, so far we looked at Lydia on Saturday night, we looked at Nicodemus on Sunday night, we looked at Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel at the women's meeting Tuesday afternoon, [00:05:04] and we thought a little bit about Gideon in the youth fellowship on Tuesday night.

And then on Wednesday we looked at Timothy.

And tonight, as will be obvious by the scriptures that I've read, we are going to spend a little time thinking about what scripture says about Inezimus.

This is one of those occasions where we won't be going over a major exposition of doctrine.

No doubt you'll be thanking the Lord for that. But if it's not one of those occasions where the mind will receive major instruction, certainly what is contained in the scripture is such as is well calculated to touch our conscience, [00:06:09] and we certainly need that. And as we consider the relationship of Philemon and Inezimus, and Paul and Inezimus, and Paul and Philemon, it may well be that our hearts are touched as well.

I like to give value for time, and I would normally, I suppose, have some slight misgivings that what I have to say may well be considered by many to be very lightweight. I might even be struggling to keep speaking till about half past eight. And I like to give full value for all this energy and prayer that you've put in to coming here tonight, some of you travelling great distance under grave difficulty. [00:07:05] But we'll take it as it comes. I feel it right that we should dwell on this tonight, and we'll see how we get on. This little epistle, Philemon, is something of an addendum, a little bit added on.

We have the major teaching epistles, in particular the seven major teaching epistles of the Apostle Paul.

The foundation epistle, Romans, the top stone, Ephesians, both instructive, instructional rather than corrective, and then in between that we have the five corrective epistles, in the order in which they come, Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians. [00:08:04] Now in each of them there is the same trend, indicated early in scripture by the distinction, but the relation between chewing the cud and the production of the cloven hoof. Or in the language of Isaiah 30 verse 21, that you'll hear a voice behind thee saying, this is the way, walk ye in it.

And if you haven't heard it before, or if you have heard it before, hundreds of times the major epistles in the New Testament are built up in the same way. First of all, a teaching part, a doctrinal part, this is the way, the truth of God outlined, and then the hortative part, exhortations based upon the teaching, walk ye in it. [00:09:01] Now after those major teaching epistles, you get something of the same order of things in the pastoral epistles, to Timothy and to Titus, and lastly here, Philemon. And so, if this is the last, before the Holy Ghost presents to us those of a special nature, or for a specific particular audience, as in Hebrew James, Peter, Peter, and then the final round up of the general truth in John's epistles, before the prophetic outline in Revelation, we can expect that in this particular epistle of Philemon, so nicely poised between the various parts of the New Testament, we can expect a link between the two, and so it is. And we can expect a living demonstration, a manifestation of the truth [00:10:04] that has been put in the first part, or the earlier part of the New Testament. So we have the teaching epistles, the pastoral epistles, then we have this sandwich between those and the general epistles, we have the epistle to Philemon. Now I'm not going to go through it, but I want to consider and make a minor, if you like, a minor character study of this man Enesimus. We learn from the text here that he had been a slave, and legally and officially he still was a slave.

He was, we might say, in the employ, more precisely I suppose in those days, he was under the ownership, the proprietorship of Philemon. [00:11:01] And to compound his position, he was not only a slave, but he was a runaway slave. He'd run away.

He was in bonds.

He thought that he could escape by activities and energy and a strategy of his own, and he

surreptitiously in some way got away from Philemon and he ran away.

A reminder to all of us, if we are believers, that there was a time in our spiritual and moral experience where we thought we'd broken free from all the things that would captivate us, but unbeknown to ourselves at that time, we were still really in deep bondage. [00:12:04] And Enesimus compounded this, it would certainly seem by inference, we can infer from things that are said by Paul to Philemon, that before he ran away, he filled his pockets with some of the belongings of Philemon in those days.

Activities punishable by the death sentence.

So that was Enesimus, that was the mess he'd got himself into as a result of his own activities. And whether or not we recognised it or not at the time, we were in a similar spiritual moral position as a result of our own activities on our own behalf. [00:13:03] We can well understand what is said again in the pastoral epistle, Titus is it, if we were to be saved, it was not by any works of righteousness that we could have done. Our father, happily, bit like Jonah, Jonah remember, he ran away and he got further and further away until he realised that like the psalmist, like the younger son in Luke 15, the further he went as a result of his own activities, the more he was getting into a cul-de-sac, a dead end, he realised that God had his eye upon him.

Now God had his eye upon Enesimus for blessing. And in a way that we don't know, Enesimus was brought into contact with the great apostle Paul [00:14:03] as a result of which he trusted the Lord, his sins were forgiven, he was liberated out of the bondage of sin and he was truly free, something that he'd always wanted to be but could never achieve, always looking over his shoulder, always having a conscience and yet now, spiritually and morally, he'd been set free from the burden of sin.

Not only had he been converted through the service of Paul, but he developed so quickly, remember, we were challenging ourselves on Wednesday night, was it, by looking at what scripture says through the epistles, in the record that is given chronologically, that Timothy was no flash in the pan. As soon as was reasonable, he began to be a help in his local assembly and step by step, [00:15:01] he was given opportunity for latent gift to develop until he became a major servant in the work of the Lord. In association with Paul, who could see of him, he worketh the work of the Lord even as I do. Now how many years were involved, I don't know. But it would seem that Enesimus, from what we are told about him, he was willing to help and he was recognised to have an ability to help by this major worker in the service of the Lord, the Apostle Paul. And furthermore, very quickly, he settled into the assembly at Colossae, which is why we read from Colossians 4, and he was a help locally and as opportunity arose, Paul took him with him and he was able to help Paul. Let us consolidate, those of us who study Timothy, let us consolidate what we've already learned during the week, [00:16:06] that if we are to be useful in the service of the Lord, it's no good beginning by imagining a great platform for service thousands of miles away. The way to begin our service for the Lord is in our own locality, in the local assembly, to which the Lord has attached us. If any gift, any major gift is going to come to light later on, it will come to light, subject as we said the other night, to the elder, more mature brethren being wise, discreet, observant, and giving latent gift the opportunity to develop, but it will be normal that someone like Enesimus, brought into a local assembly, will stick in, he will apply himself, he will read the scriptures, he will pray every day, [00:17:02] he will take every opportunity to be at every assembly function, unless he's physically or medically prevented, as his commitments allow, and it will be normal that he will get on with things in the local setting and that also others will recognize whatever potential there is for special responsibility. Now the Colossians realized, and the Apostles Paul realized, that this man from an extremely difficult background, whether born into

slavery or bought into slavery, that here he was, having made a mess of his earlier life, that here he was, he trusted the Lord, he'd been given the opportunity, and he had taken the opportunity to develop in his own soul and to be a help in his own locality [00:18:01] and with major servants for the Lord as opportunity gave rise.

And here we have a letter from Paul to Philemon. Perhaps Philemon hadn't heard anything about Onesimus from time to time. Perhaps, as a diligent master, he may well have written off Onesimus with others who had likewise run away.

And then he gets a letter. How would you and I receive such a letter?

We thought the other night about Timothy, 1 Thessalonians 3, remember. If Paul was sending a delegate to inquire how things were getting on in another part of the country, have you and I the moral qualifications that mean that Paul would select us [00:19:06] and say, right, there's a job to be done. I know your heart and you know mine. We are like-minded. I want you to go there and represent me. This is the other end of the same story, isn't it? Paul writes to Philemon and said, I've got good news for you. I've got some great news. In a world that's full of bad news, isn't it nice just now and again, just to get a little snippet of good news that we can thank the Lord for. Well, Paul writes to Philemon and he says, I have some excellent news for you. Remember Onesimus, he's trusted the Lord and he's involved in the work of the Lord with me. Oh Onesimus, if he was a normal Christian with normal feelings and normal motives, [00:20:02] after his first intake of breath, Onesimus, oh yes, he cost me a packet of money when he ran away for finding a replacement and training him. I trained him up to take a responsible job and then just when he was ready, fully trained, he ran away. Now the flesh in Onesimus would rush to that negative kind of thought. But Paul, who knows his own heart and knows the heart of Philemon, he writes and he says, now look, this is good news. You lost him, but he's now my game.

I don't know what sort of professional accountant the Apostle Paul would have made, but he has some very, very good simple teaching, hasn't he, on profit and loss or gain and loss. And he says to Philemon here, look, when he left you, you said, right, [00:21:02] I'll have to write that off as a dead loss. It's an irrecoverable debt. I won't get him back and I won't get what he put in his pockets when he ran away. But Paul said, the Lord knoweth all things.

The Lord knoweth the heart. And that word that keeps coming again and again into your mind and mine as a blessing and as a challenge. When Philemon realised that Onesimus had run away, if it had been written, yes it was, if it had been written by then, I wonder if he'd read the epistle to the Romans by then. And he could say with the Apostle, all things work together for good. I wonder if he knew that, if he said that when Onesimus ran away. [00:22:03] Now this is the sort of practical lesson that we get tonight. How do we react to bad news or apparently bad news? If we have plans to do a certain thing on a certain day or in a certain way or something seems to be maturing along the lines of our expectations, then there's a sudden shift or we get a disappointment or the weather changes or the bank manager doesn't like us any longer and we find that what we'd planned to do, it just can't happen. What is our immediate reaction? Now we are not buffoons.

We don't go around with a silly grin on our face all the time. But is there that deep inner conviction that everything that the Lord brings upon us day by day is for our eventual spiritual good?

[00:23:04] Whether he did, we are not told. But Paul is saying, look back, think back to that day when

you realised that your slave had run away. I guess it's nothing new for most decisions to be made on a financial basis.

I guess even then, people like Philemon had a budget. And he might well conclude on many a day, I'd like to do that or people would prefer me to do that and then he explained, I'm sorry, the budget won't allow. All the textbooks, even to we lay people, tell us that every decision has a financial connotation. We know that. We don't need the textbooks to tell us. And something like a runaway slave would certainly have affected Philemon adversely, wouldn't it? [00:24:04] But would he?

Would we in that position say, well, the Lord must have a purpose. And my exercise is to find out the Lord's purpose in bringing this apparently adverse circumstance on me. We have feelings.

Won't be sad if we had no feelings.

But we aren't governed primarily by feelings. To some measure at least, we are the instructed of the Lord. We have a framework of the teaching of scripture. And we know that the Lord's will for us is far better long term than any of our immediate plans. And here Paul writes to Philemon and says, whether or not you gave thanks at the time, in view of what the answer would eventually be, he says, now I can give you the detail as to why it was proper. [00:25:09] Like the one in the Old Testament when an adverse circumstance to hear the Lord's voice saying, this thing is from me. And Paul says, you lost them for a little while, temporarily, he says, so that you and I can have permanent, indeed eternal gain. Wouldn't it be worthwhile?

Wouldn't it be a cause for thanksgiving if we realised that every adversity in time provides the springboard for spiritual eternal blessing? Forming us as vessels for the service of the Lord and forming a capacity within us to joy in our God. Now something of this comes through in the little practical lesson that we get here. [00:26:02] So the temporary loss of the bond slave, Inezimus, led to, in the mercy of God, to his conversion, to his integration into the assembly at Colossae, and to his being involved in the work of the Lord with the apostle Paul. Now why? Why was that possible?

Why did the Lord order the circumstances in that way?

We get a clue from the text, of course. Paul said, now look, previously he was unprofitable.

He cost you something. It was all negative. All but in future he's going to be profitable, both to you and to me. [00:27:01] What a change!

And the apostle writes, and he says in his letter, that there's been a tremendous change. Now for that reason I read 2 Corinthians chapter 5. It sums up the Christian teaching.

You may well think that there was a moment in your experience, and it was necessary, when everything hung upon your deciding to be a Christian, on you repenting of your sins. And of course that was true as to your responsibility. But even greater issues than that were at stake. In the sight of God, your old life was being brought to an abrupt terminus. It was being brought to an end. And a new life was beginning from that point, which you could never have lived before. [00:28:01] Paul wrote to Philemon.

I wonder what would have happened.

If the day you were converted, the day you trusted the Lord, if someone like Paul had written to your family, your school friends, your neighbours, particularly your neighbours, and said, I've got good news for you, and naming you by name said, the old life of that person has come to a complete end, they've completely changed, and a new life for them has just begun.

[00:29:04] If you knew that letter was being sent.

And it was given to you to put through the letterbox. Would you be happy and say, oh yes, I'd be glad to post that. Or might you be tempted to think, oh I'd better wait and see. Mightn't work out like that. I mightn't get rid of my bad temper all at once. Some of the old habits might stick. I think I'd better wait just to see how it goes before I post that letter to my unconverted relatives, or school friends, or workmates, or as I say, particularly the neighbours. Perhaps it's even more testing if you say to me, right, you trusted the Lord ten years ago, say.

[00:30:05] You've lived where you are for thirty years, so we're going to write to your neighbours, and we're going to tell them, now your neighbour, Jack, he trusted the Lord, he became a Christian ten years ago. Would you like to search your memory and reply, please, and tell us all the changes you noticed overnight, ten years ago, when your neighbour became a Christian. Would be telling, wouldn't it? Let me tell you one experience, perhaps.

I knew a very energetic Christian man.

Oh, he was certainly a believer. [00:31:02] He'd lived quite a debauched life previous to his conversion.

Everything he did, like Saul of Tarsus, everything he did, he did in a wholehearted way, not by half measure.

A hard drinker, a hard fighter, everything he did, he did to the ultimate. He trusted the Lord, and a few years later, two people were asked what they thought of this person.

Now, the two people that were asked to comment were both Christian believers, and they made what one could expect to be a balanced comment. Now, one Christian, who'd known the original party most of his adult life, he beamed, and he said, the day he trusted the Lord, he changed completely.

[00:32:12] Someone was asked for his verdict, and he said, he's just the same today as he was before he trusted the Lord, he's still got to be the boss. That's one simple example, I'm sure multiplied by the thousand, in the experience of many people that we've met. You've met it, and in some ways, the life is revolutionized, but if we aren't careful, there are certain things about what we used to be, as attached to the old life, that if we aren't careful, still persist.

From childhood, many of us have sung happy little words, like, I may not get it verbatim, something like, [00:33:07] things are different now, something's happened to me, since I gave my life to Jesus.

Oh, we can sing that at five years of age, can't we? And we can mean it. And trusting the Lord does revolutionize your life.

In the sight of God, judicially, the old life is gone, and gone forever, in the cross of Christ. Those of you who are currently going through Romans, will have been through that point, where you come to a

point in the experience of your soul, that you know that when Christ died, that brought to an end before God, all my old life, which I used to live, as a natural person, a natural man, as scripture uses the term.

[00:34:05] To use the term in Corinthians, which we read, and it's put in a very graphic, staccato way, isn't it? Any man, in Christ, there you are, an example of new creation.

Old life gone, a new life begun, and yet, we know that it's not always as easy as it sounds.

Now, what's the problem?

There is a verse, which deals with the problem, Galatians 5, and about verse 17.

The spirit lusteth against the flesh, and the flesh against the spirit.

Putting it in simple words, when we trust the Lord, God implants within us a new nature, with new instincts.

[00:35:11] Instincts to please God. Instincts to live in such a way as God can look upon with pleasure and satisfaction. A new life is begun, and in God's sight, the old life is finished.

The complication is, that as long as we are in this life, until the Lord shall come, or he shall remove us from the sphere of responsibility, the old nature is left in the kind of things that were common and natural to us before we trusted the Lord. And there is a new nature, again zealous to express itself, and life has this tendency to express the nature of that life, [00:36:07] and the new nature implanted within us has a nature according to God, and expresses itself in a way that pleases God. And the tug, this tug of war, only begins when there are the two natures there. The natural man has no tug of war, he only has one nature. But once we've trusted the Lord, and we've had the new nature implanted within us, and we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit encourages and empowers us to express the new nature according to God in a way that pleases God. So if we find there's a struggle going on, don't be too upset, because it's evidence that there's two natures there. [00:37:03] But in every situation, we don't give up, we don't yield to the old nature, we have the opportunity of demonstrating yes to neighbours, yes to relatives, yes to workmates, work to fellow scholars, yes, our lives have changed, yes, as the chorus says, some things happened to me since I gave my heart to Jesus. Well, this had happened in the case of Philemon.

It seems to me that after all the teaching epistles and the pastoral epistles, that the way the canon of scripture was built up is that God so controlled things, that before we are turned to the more general epistles and the more special epistles, [00:38:01] that we have an example given of what I would call normal Christianity.

One example of normal Christianity is, we might say, Philippians chapter 3, an illustration of what happens when the old life comes to an end and we say, well, if God's finished with it, I'm finished with it as well. That's the kind of life I used to live, but now with God's help and by God's spirit, it's now possible. And I intend to take every opportunity to live in a way that pleases God. So Philippians 3 is an outline of normal Christianity. And the example of Enesimus, again, is an example of normal Christianity. We use the word normal rather than average. Whether the average is better, the same or worse than normal is secondary. [00:39:05] But here we have an outline of the fact that someone

who tried to run away from the circumstances of life, that God followed through and claimed him for himself and produced a revolution in that life, so that the new nature implanted, the new life imparted could express itself, which not only pleased God, although that was of first-rank importance, but that even his old master, according to the circumstances of life, his old master, could receive him back and see the change that had been brought about. I like the way that Philemon, the master, the earthly master, Enesimus, the earthly slave, [00:40:06] and Paul, the great apostle, all show evidence of Christian feeling, Christian motive and Christian activity in the way they blend together to demonstrate. Paul says to Enesimus, before you can really serve the Lord with diligence and a good conscience, there are matters that need to be settled, or the old life is finished before God as to judgment. God can say that, and I can yield to that, but what I cannot say is, what happened in the old life's got nothing to do with me, God has brought it to an end in the cross of Christ, and I don't care what happened before.

[00:41:02] If there's unfinished business, if there are debts to pay, if there are matters to settle, the earlier that's done, the more honestly, the more conscientiously, the more diligently I'll be able to get on with serving the Lord. We cannot just assume that any previous debts can be written off.

I did hear of a very good example a few years ago.

A man fell into debt in his business, was made bankrupt. A few years later, he was brought to his senses spiritually.

He had confessed the Lord previously, but he was restored in communion with his Lord, [00:42:02] and the first thing he did, he got a list which, in accountancy terms, had been written off, debts written off. He got a copy of the list, and he went round, he knocked on every door, and he says, excuse me, he says, the world thinks it's written off, but I owe you 120 pounds. He said, well, I want you to know that I'm a committed Christian now, and I don't want to take the easy way out. He says, I cannot pay that all at the moment, but will it be satisfactory to you if I pay you 10 pounds a month for 12 months? And he went round all his creditors like that. Now, you and I would say, yes, of course, that's normal Christianity. That's the obvious thing to do. Oh, but I wonder how many of us, if it had been years back, and it had been written off in everybody's audited accounts, and it was all forgotten about, [00:43:08] I wonder how many of us would have had consciences tender enough that the Lord could say, yes, all your debts are written off in heaven, but that doesn't mean you should ignore your responsibilities on earth. And how many of us, I wonder, would be moved, as that man was, to make sure that there was nothing outstanding against him on earth that would bring the witness to his master into disrepute. I'm sure, again, many of you have examples. My time is finished. Thank you for listening to these simple remarks. But I do find in reading these simple epistles, if I take it as an example of normal Christianity, and put my name, whether substituting it for Paul and his attitude, [00:44:02] or whether it was put my name instead of Philemon, or whether I put my name instead of Inesimus, I wonder to what extent I would match the plumb line of scripture. Let us leave that with the Lord and think about it. Let us sing in closing our hymn number 288.

O thou whose mercies far exceed all we can do or say, as in thy people thou indeed dost daily more display. 288. O thou whose mercies far exceed all we can do or say, as in thy people thou indeed dost daily more display.

[00:45:09] Blessed art thou, O God, blessed art thou, O God, miner to all my debt and love, thy richest blessing flow.

Preserve thy power, O gracious Lord, by thine own powerful hand.

Amen.