

Scripture Reference: Philemon 15-16

Date: November 16, 2014

Title: "Making Sense of What Happens"

Focus: Being Open to the Unexpected Movement of God
(Philemon 3 of 4)

Paul approached Philemon on the issue of Onesimus as much as to help Philemon as to benefit Onesimus. Paul sought to help Philemon look beyond what is apparent to his eyes. Philemon was asked to consider another possibility, a spiritual purpose behind this physical event.

This was important for Paul to do. Because people's obsession with their perceived *loss* can inhibit the ability to see things from God's perspective.

Two Important Foundational Principles to Note About God

a. God is Sovereign

God dictates terms; terms do not dictate God.

God is not at the mercy of circumstance or situations. He is the *cause* in circumstances and situations (Acts 17:28).

Since God is sovereign, nothing is to be perceived as taking place outside of His will. Anything that touches a life has passed through His hands.

People struggle with reconciling this to their understanding of what is *good* vs. *bad*, *right* vs. *wrong*.

Understand, our struggle is not because God is wrong, but, because we lack the capacity to understand at the level of God (Isa. 55:8-9).

This is why trust is essential for the disciple.

b. God promise to His disciples is all things will develop them into His image (Rom. 8:28-29)

God allows things into the life of the unredeemed that they might turn to Him.

However, for the disciple, God's intent is different. His promise is that He will use whatever comes into the disciple's life to cause that person to know Him better and consequently be transformed into His character.

The question is, will the believer be obedient, allowing God to do His work?

Paul is trying to help Philemon see God's work in the case with Onesimus.

***“Perhaps he was . . .”*; v. 15**

Paul's words to Philemon are not meant to put a positive spin on things. They are more than that.

Paul is asking Philemon to consider this event from *another* perspective, for that of God's.

What makes seeing things from God's perspective, or anyone's for that matter, difficult is a person's commitment to him or herself.

Opening the door to God's possibility first requires surrendering to the reality that we do not have complete understanding of circumstances and all potentialities. There might be something more or better than we are aware of.

Philemon needed to recognize that the return of Onesimus was about more than having his property back.

Are you willing to open yourself up to the possibilities of God, even if it means something other than what you can imagine? What hinders you from this?

What Can God Possibly Do?

Because of what God had done in Onesimus' life, he had gone from being "worthless" to "profitable."

This demonstrates God ability to redeem situations we perceive as being a *loss* into a *gain*.

If, as followers of Jesus in relationship with God, we cannot bring ourselves to trust Him, how are we able to live so that He is glorified by His working in us?

First, stop being reliant upon your ability to make sense of circumstances.

Second, stop limiting circumstances to what you are capable to conceiving or bringing to pass.

Third, seek God and His glory. This will remove you as an obstacle and allow God total access.

Last, be obedient to what God says and shows you, regardless.

Eph. 3:20-21; “*To [God] who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.*”

What can God possibly do? This Onesimus, who had once been worthless and who was now profitable, at the least benefitted Paul (v. 15), probably to the church in Colossi (Col. 4:9), and possibly to the believers in Asia Minor as a bishop.

The Last Eighteen Inches

On one hand people believe God is able to do anything. Yet, on the other, disciples are unwilling to allow Him to use them and their circumstances in a manner they cannot conceive.

The result of this disconnect is that God is inhibited and the Spirit is grieved (Eph. 4:30).

What inhibits *you* from seeing things from God’s perspective and therefore yielding to what He can do in your life to glorify Himself, transforming the lives of others.