

NOTES FROM SIMEON WOODCRAFT'S SERMON JULY 30THAM

“WHAT'S IN A NAME?” TEXT: PHILEMON VI-7

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES FROM THE ESV

Philemon vv1-7 Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker ² and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house: ³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, ⁶ 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.^[a] ⁷ For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

We would all like to make a name for ourselves by being good at something! As we look at this letter written to a man who was a friend, a church leader and a slave owner, ask yourself this question:

What does your name stand for and what is the reputation that you have?

1. **Who are you? (vv1-2).** There are many ways in which we choose to identify ourselves or are identified by others – we might be father, mother, farmer, IT worker, lazy or hard working. We might not always be comfortable with how others view us, and sometimes our identities are by-products of our behaviour or of situations and circumstances beyond our control.

The apostle Paul knew something about having things forced upon him. **Paul, a prisoner for Christ**, was not necessarily a name he would have chosen for himself. Owning Christ as your Lord and Saviour and preaching the good news that God in Christ has come to rescue sinners can often get you into trouble, as Paul discovered multiple times in his life. When you do the same with your family or work colleagues, people around you may think you are losing the plot. Being known for standing up for Christ caused trouble for Paul on many occasions, and now, as he wrote this letter of pastoral care to his friend, he can identify himself as a prisoner. He has been locked up and his freedom to preach in synagogues and marketplaces has gone, yet, remarkably, he can say that he considers himself a **prisoner for Christ**.

For Paul, the gospel of Jesus Christ is not simply a message but rather the reality of a life.

Living for Jesus is not simply about subscribing to a set of beliefs.

It is a life lived wherever and however God sees fit.

For Paul, that meant planting churches, preaching the gospel in places where it had not been heard before, and, if God so ordained it, being a prisoner.

Paul's identity is found in Christ.

For Paul, he is who Christ says he is.

That becomes clear as he identifies others in this letter, because he identifies them all in relation to Christ.

a) Philemon, a dear friend and fellow worker. Most of the contents of this letter are directed to Philemon, with whom in the past Paul had quite a significant friendship. Paul reminds Philemon that he was instrumental in his salvation (v19). Philemon is a dear friend because they have shared ministry together. A wonderful thing happens when you get people together who love the Lord Jesus. Though you may be unknown to one another at the start, you quickly come to love one another because you can see Jesus at work in each other's life. You are all fellow workers in the gospel and become beloved of one another. A dear friend is the kind of friend who has blessed you in some way, one with whom you have shared close fellowship. Even if you don't see them for a little while, you know that if you turn up on their doorstep, they will welcome you with open arms.

Philemon is a dear friend, but also a fellow worker. He has continued to use his life, his time and his resources for the spreading of the good news of the gospel.

Just like Paul, Philemon has recognised that the only person worth serving is Jesus Christ.

In today's world, many people think they are the only person worth serving! We live in a time when people serve their mobile phones or social media. We have become slaves to the makers of platforms that provide us with endless trivial entertainment. We give it inordinate amounts of time and concentration.

Wise people are fellow workers in the gospel because the rewards are eternal and the lessons we learn are worth more than anything money can buy.

b) Archippus our fellow soldier. Paul chooses to identify Archippus as a fellow soldier, a title which conjures up images of discipline, fighting and warfare, rather than ease or disorder. He is one who is in the trenches for Christ and has no qualms about assaulting the ranks of the enemy. He is perhaps an evangelist. Clearly, he is having a time of struggle and it is the same for us. We need to recognise that this is warfare, and we are in a battle.

A soldier is used to hard graft and spiritual combat and is the kind of person you want with you when you are about Christ's business, sharing the good news and dealing with the devil's attacks.

c) Timothy our brother and Apphia our sister. These might seem less worthy descriptions, but they are not. Timothy is Paul's right-hand man, working tirelessly for the gospel. Soldier, dear friend and fellow worker are descriptions that also apply to him, and to Apphia.

To be a brother or sister in Christ means that you have recognised the sin that is in your life, and trusted Jesus Christ to be your Saviour. By God's grace, you are now in the family of God. Blood is thicker than water, and what holds us together is the shed blood of Jesus Christ. There are always fellow Christians who rub us up the wrong way, but we recognise that they are brothers and sisters in Christ. True brothers and sisters in Christ have a bond that transcends all other identities. A believer in Christ can travel round the world and have more in common with complete strangers who love the Lord than with their own flesh and blood.

To be a brother or sister in Christ is the most tremendous privilege.

In this family, there is the one blood running throughout – that of Christ Jesus.

- **Ask yourself - How do you identify yourself, and perhaps more importantly how do others identify you?**

2) Who do you serve? (vv2-4) We all serve someone or something, and there are tellers in our lives that give away who or what it is.

- What do you choose to give your time to?
- Where do your thoughts go when you are alone?
- What do you invest your money in.

Today, serving Christ is seen as drudgery. Generally, people want to spend as little time as possible helping in any ministry. Of course, it's possible to be over-involved, but these days, it is more likely that there are just a few people carrying all the weight. If everyone who is able stood up and did something, the load would be evenly shared. In times gone by, people considered that they had a calling to a particular ministry and were willing to go the extra mile. Living that way can only happen when you recognise that you are serving Christ, and that he is the one to whom you wish to give yourself entirely.

When you recognise that you are serving Christ, any sacrifice would be no sacrifice at all, but sheer delight.

Paul's greeting (Grace and peace) speaks into why God's people serve him. Grace and peace flow to those who have discovered Christ, and who serve him above all.

- a) **God our Father – only those who are saved.** Part of coming to faith in Christ is accepting that you are in the family. All blessings come to us from the Father. All the grace and the good gifts he chooses to bestow on us flow out of our relationship with him. The closer the relationship is with the Father, the keener the service and the greater the grasping of his grace and peace will be. We often think that enjoyment comes separate from God, and wish we were not so busy in ministry, but we must not just take the gifts without responding in service to him.
- b) **The Lord Jesus Christ – only those who serve.** Grasping who Jesus is will determine how we serve. If you simply view Jesus as your get out of jail free card or consider that grace means that you can live as you please, then you have not understood that Jesus Christ is Lord. He is the King of your life, but sadly we often view him as we view King Charles – a king in little more than name.

Jesus is the kind of King whose word carries power.

He is the King of all things, and the King of your life.

- c) **Prayer – only those in relationship.** Paul is dependant on God, seeking him in prayer. One of the obvious signs that a believer has grasped who Jesus is and how dependant he is on him is his prayer life.
- Most of us would have to confess that our prayer lives are not what they could be.

It doesn't matter how much you are involved in ministry – if you don't pray, you are still just serving yourself.

Prayer is an acknowledgement:

- Of your own inability to direct the affairs of your life
- That it all depends on God

Bringing your own life and the lives of others before God in prayer is the Christian's primary ministry. If we fail at prayer, we fail at everything.

- **Ask yourself: who is it that you serve? Maybe today is the day to start that service in prayers of confession about your own self service.**

3) **What are you known for? (vv5-7)** Paul thanks God for Philemon and others because he has received reports about them that underline their walk with Christ.

a) **Love and faith towards Christ and his people.** Reputations matter, though they may not always be deserved, but crucially our reputation with God is what matters most. The love of Christ was being displayed by Philemon and the church in their love for one another. **By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.** ¹⁷ **But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?** ¹⁸ **Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.** (1 John 3:16-18).

- If you cannot love the people in this church with Christ's help, how will you ever love those outside the church?

b) **Sharing their faith.** Paul gives thanks for them because they are making Christ known. Sharing your faith in Christ with others is the quickest way to grow in your understanding of Christ. Although the church is often involved in evangelistic activities, there are many places where you, as an individual, go that the church doesn't! If you want to grow, start gossiping the good news of Christ.

c) **Comfort, love and refreshment.** When Paul thinks of Philemon, his heart is filled with joy. Can anyone say this of you? Philemon has had such an influence on Paul because he sees the way that he refreshes the hearts of the saints.

This is a church leader's calling – to be the one who, through his regular ministry, is seeking to help Christians understand that

It is in Christ that Christians are empowered to serve him.

You might be thinking you can never do all of this. Humbly come to the Lord Jesus and acknowledge that you cannot do it yourself.

Grace and peace come from the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is only as we make Christ the most precious thing in our lives that we will ever have a hope of gaining a good reputation with Christ.

Do the words of the hymn below apply to you?

You might want to pray as follows:

Lord, work in my soul this day to transform me.

Jesus the name high over all
In hell or earth or sky
Angels and men before it fall
And devils fear and fly

Jesus the name to sinners dear
The name to sinners given
It scatters all their guilty fear
It turns their hell to heaven

Jesus the prisoners' fetters breaks
And bruises Satan's head
Power into strengthless souls it speaks
And life into the dead

O that the world might taste and see
The riches of His grace
The arms of love that compass me
Would all mankind embrace

His only righteousness I show
His saving grace proclaim
'Tis all my business here below
To cry behold the Lamb

Happy if with my latest breath
I might but gasp His name
Preach Him to all and cry in death
Behold behold the Lamb