

Through the Bible

PHILEMON

Zac Poonen



Illustrations by Vinay Kuruvilla

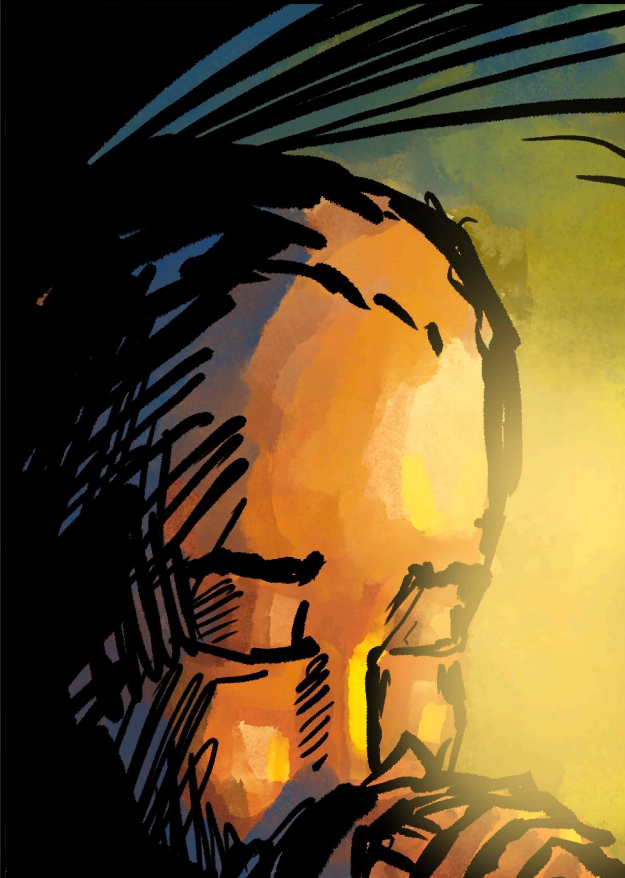
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Philemon

PAUL WROTE THIS TO A RICH BROTHER, PHILEMON. APPHIA (1:2) WAS PROBABLY HIS WIFE. ARCHIPPUS, WHOM WE CONSIDERED IN COLOSSIANS 4:17, WAS PROBABLY HIS SON. PHILEMON PROBABLY LIVED IN COLOSSAE. HE WAS PROBABLY AN ELDER IN THAT CHURCH AND THE CHURCH MAY HAVE BEEN MEETING IN HIS HOUSE.



FIRST OF ALL PAUL SAYS, "I THANK GOD FOR YOU, AND I PRAY FOR YOU REGULARLY." IT IS A GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT TO ANYONE IF HE KNOWS THAT A SERVANT OF GOD IS PRAYING FOR HIM.



PAUL GOES ON TO SAY, "I THANK GOD FOR YOUR LOVE AND FAITH AND I HAVE HAD A LOT OF JOY AND COMFORT IN KNOWING THAT YOU ARE A BLESSING TO THE SAINTS" (1:5--7). PAUL WAS NOT FLATTERING HIM. PAUL. HE WAS ENCOURAGING HIM WITH WORDS OF APPRECIATION.



ONESIMUS WAS HIS SLAVE WHO HAD RUN AWAY FROM HIM AND GONE TO ROME.



THERE, IN THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD, HE CAME IN TOUCH WITH PAUL AND WAS CONVERTED.




PAUL IS NOW AN OLD MAN IN JAIL FOR THE GOSPEL'S SAKE AND HIS ONLY REQUEST TO PHILEMON IS THAT HE WILL SHOW SOME KINDNESS TO ONESIMUS, WHOM PAUL HAD WON TO THE LORD WHILE IN JAIL (1:10).



HE REMINDS PHILEMON THAT HE OWED HIS LIFE TO PAUL (1:19). HE HAD BEEN SAVED THROUGH PAUL'S MINISTRY. AND SO PAUL COULD HAVE ORDERED HIM TO DO SOMETHING. BUT HE WOULD NOT ORDER HIM. INSTEAD HE BEGGED HIM. A TRUE SERVANT OF GOD NEVER TAKES ADVANTAGE OF HIS AUTHORITY.



IN THOSE DAYS, IF A SLAVE RAN AWAY FROM HIS MASTER, THE LAW PERMITTED THE MASTER TO KILL HIM WHEN HE FOUND HIM.



HE TOLD PHILEMON THAT WHEN ONESIMUS CAME BACK TO HIM, HE WAS COMING BACK AS A **BROTHER** IN CHRIST. ONCE HE WAS ONLY A SLAVE. NOW HE IS A BROTHER **AS WELL**. GOD USED HIS **RUNNING AWAY** SO THAT HE COULD COME BACK AS A **BROTHER** (1:15). THE NAME ONESIMUS MEANS "**USEFUL**" -- AND PAUL SAYS THAT HE WOULD BE REALLY **USEFUL** TO PHILEMON NOW.



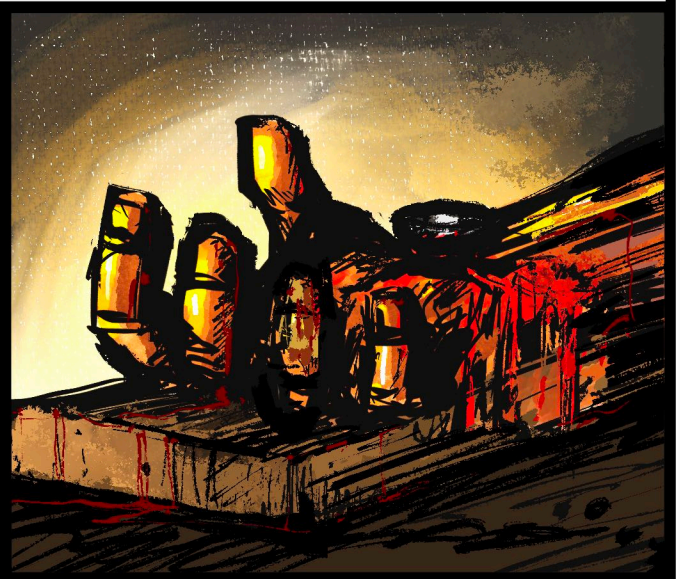
PAUL IS TELLING PHILEMON, "SUPPOSE YOU SAW ME COMING TOWARD YOUR HOUSE, HOW WOULD YOU RECEIVE ME? PLEASE RECEIVE ONESIMUS IN EXACTLY THE SAME WAY."



THIS REMINDS US OF HOW JESUS SPEAKS ABOUT US TO THE FATHER. "FATHER, THIS CHILD RAN AWAY FROM THE HOUSE, LIVED IN SIN AND LIVED A GODLESS LIFE. BUT I FOUND HIM AND I HAVE BROUGHT HIM BACK. PLEASE ACCEPT HIM, AS YOU ACCEPT ME."



THEN PAUL SAYS, "IF ONESIMUS HAS CHEATED YOU AND ROBBED SOMETHING FROM YOUR HOUSE, WHATEVER THE AMOUNT MAY BE, CHARGE IT TO MY ACCOUNT. I WILL REPAY IT."



AND THAT IS WHAT JESUS ALSO SAID, "CHARGE THOSE SINS HE HAS COMMITTED TO MY ACCOUNT."



HERE IS A PREACHER WHO, INSTEAD OF ASKING FOR MONEY FOR HIMSELF, OFFERS MONEY TO A BELIEVER!!



REMEMBER THAT PAUL WAS NOT A RICH MAN GETTING MONEY FROM THE CHURCHES. BUT WITH THE LITTLE HE HAD EARNED WITH HIS TENT-MAKING BUSINESS, HE SAID TO ONESIMUS, "I WILL HELP YOU WITH WHAT I HAVE."



PAUL WAS REASONABLE. HE DID NOT TELL PHILEMON TO **SHARE HIS PROPERTY** WITH ONESIMUS. NO. FOR ONESIMUS WAS STILL A **SLAVE**. PAUL DID **NOT** CARRY ON A **CRUSADE** AGAINST **SLAVERY** IN **THOSE** DAYS.



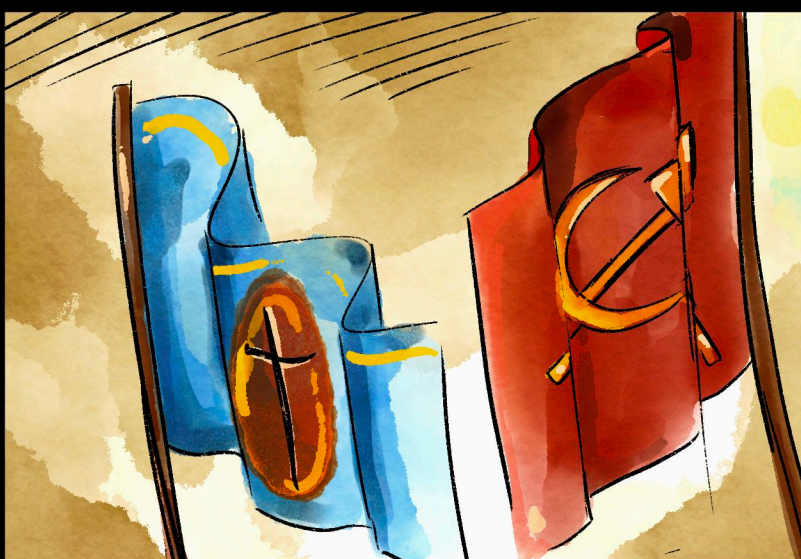
TO CARRY ON A **CRUSADE** AGAINST **SLAVERY** IS A **GOOD** THING. BUT PAUL KNEW THAT THAT WAS **NOT** HIS **CALLING**. SOME ARE **CALLED** TO DO THAT.



HE KNEW THAT GOD HAD CALLED HIM TO DO SOMETHING **BETTER** THAN **SOCIAL SERVICE** -- WHICH WOULD **BENEFIT** PEOPLE ONLY IN THIS WORLD. PAUL KNEW THAT GOD HAD CALLED HIM TO MAKE **DISCIPLES** AND TO BUILD THE **CHURCH** -- FOR THAT WOULD BRING **ETERNAL** RESULTS.



IN BEING OCCUPIED THUS WITH A **GOOD** THING, YOU CAN **MISS** THE **BEST** THAT GOD WANTS YOU TO BE ENGAGED IN.



THE **LORD** DID **NOT** COME TO **ABOLISH** ALL **SOCIAL** DISTINCTIONS OR TO **EQUALISE** THE **WEALTH** OF ALL **CHRISTIANS**. HE DID **NOT** COME TO GET THE **RICH** TO **DISTRIBUTE** THEIR **WEALTH** TO THE **POOR**. THAT IS **COMMUNISM** -- AND **CHRISTIANITY** IS **NOT** **COMMUNISM**.



ONESIMUS AND PHILEMON WERE **NOT** **EQUAL** IN THEIR **EARTHLY** RANK OR IN THEIR **PRIVILEGES** OR IN THEIR **WEALTH**. IN ALL THOSE AREAS THEY **DIFFERED** FROM EACH OTHER, THROUGHOUT THEIR **EARTHLY** LIVES. BUT THEY WERE **EQUAL** AND ONE AS **BROTHERS** IN **CHRIST**.