

Our Partner Jesus
Philemon 1: 8-20

Good Morning God 's people! God is so good, all the time!
Last week I sent you a pastoral letter. I proposed to everyone to fast or to reduce eating as much as we can for the remaining two weeks of Lent to pray in the Lord's suffering.

Dear God's people! This is the time to pray. It is time to pray earnestly for ourselves, for our families, for our church, for our community, and our country. I sincerely ask you to pray for the people who are suffering because of their diseases. I am convinced that our prayers will never be in vain, and that the Lord will answer them.

Today's scripture, the Book of Philemon, talks about a man who changed his life after meeting Jesus Christ. The man's name was Onesimus. Onesimus was a slave to a Christian named Philemon. Onesimus betrayed his master by stealing money from him mentioned in verse 18. According to the Roman laws of that time, Onesimus committed a crime punishable by death.

The Book of Philemon is a personal letter from Apostle Paul to Onesimus' master, Philemon, which lists a few personal favors from Paul to Philemon. The Book of Philemon is the shortest of Apostle Paul's letters. Although the Book of Philemon is short, it clearly illustrates the dramatic changes that take place when a person becomes partners with Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ came to us as our Savior and was pierced on the cross for our sins, he was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed. Jesus Christ gave everything for us and is a real friend in difficulties and turmoil.

Today is the fifth Sunday of Lent. I hope that we make him our good partner in our life, home, church, and community.

I would like to share with you three reasons why Jesus is a good partner in our life.

1. We need Jesus Christ as our good partner because we are weak.

When first I started a new church in Virginia in 1997 as a pastor, one of the church members asked me to visit and pray for their work place and new business. The business was the making and remodeling of kitchen cabinets. There were two business owners; one had good technological skill but couldn't speak English and the other had good communication and business skill and could speak English well. Within the next six months, their business grew so fast and moved to a bigger place. I thought they were good business partners because they covered each other's shortcomings.

Business owners often seek partners when they cannot run their business independently without resources or something else that stops them from running their own business. For example, they may need additional capital, or may lack experience, or lack technological knowledge. If a person has enough capital, resources, experience,

and technological knowledge then there would be no need for a business partner. One would naturally run his own business.

Likewise, we need a spiritual business partner like Jesus Christ because we are lacking spiritually. We need Jesus because we are sinners in front of God. We do not have the ability or strength to carry out any endeavors on our own; that is why we need Jesus' help.

Jesus says in Matthew 9, verses 12 and 13, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but the sinners."

We need Jesus as our partner because we are not perfect and righteous. On the contrary, we need Jesus because we are sinners, ignorant, unable, and weak. We need Jesus as our partner not because we are perfect, but because we are imperfect, lacking, and full of sin.

Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:27 and 28: "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He has chosen the lowly things of this world and the despised things- and the things that are not- to nullify the things that are".

Those who are perfect and righteous do not need Jesus as their partner. Only those who are sinners and imperfect can call Jesus their partner.

2. When we make Jesus our partner, we become useful and beneficial to others.

The name 'Onesimus,' in Greek, means 'profitable, beneficial, or useful.'

Let's take look at verse 11. Apostle Paul says, "Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me."

Apostle Paul cleverly uses the meaning of the name 'Onesimus' to compare and contrast the changes in Onesimus' past and present.

In truth, Onesimus led a life that betrayed the meaning of his name. He was a no-good slave who betrayed his master, Philemon, and stole his money.

According to the Roman law and customs, he was truly a useless man, an outsider to society. However, while in prison, he met Apostle Paul and received Jesus as his savior and partner. A useless, harmful outsider became a beneficial man to Paul, Philemon, and numerous others. In verse 16, Paul asks Philemon to greet and treat Onesimus not as a slave, but "as a beloved brother."

2 Corinthians 5:17 states: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." Those who become partners of Jesus will be born again as a beneficial and useful person for God and humankind. Let us live with our partner, Jesus, in this troubled world and during this crisis due to Coronavirus.

3. Those who become partners with Jesus will experience great success in all their comings and goings.

Broken personal relations should uncoil and improve. In the letter to Philemon, there are three main characters. The triangular relationship between these characters is the main theme of the Book of Philemon. When Apostle Paul writes to Philemon regarding Onesimus, he is asking all three for a very difficult favor. All three had a common denominator, Jesus. All three people were already indebted to Jesus before they were indebted to each other. Because of their partner, Jesus, their delicate and uncertain triangular relationship carried on smoothly.

According to verse 19 of today's scripture, Philemon is a man who converted to Christianity due to Apostle Paul's evangelism.

In a way, Philemon was indebted to Paul because of his love. Onesimus stole money from Philemon, his master. Therefore, not only was Onesimus legally indebted to Philemon, but he also owed Philemon a debt of forgiveness, love, and gratitude. While in prison, Onesimus became a crucial piece of Paul's life. He looked after Paul in every way possible, ensuring the maximum amount of comfort Paul experienced in prison. Therefore, Apostle Paul was also indebted to Onesimus, the debt of love.

Through their partner, Jesus Christ: Paul, Onesimus, and Philemon were indebted to each other, the debt of love and forgiveness. Because of Jesus, they were able to reconcile, forgive, and love each other.

I believe interpersonal relationships, especially broken or entangled ones, will work out for everyone who becomes partners with Jesus Christ.

Jesus gives us the intellect and abilities to solve all types of problems. He gives us the strength to forgive and to love. All endeavors and human activities will succeed and prosper under our partner Jesus Christ.

One day, Albert Einstein (1879-1955) was riding on a train. The train conductor was checking the tickets of each of the passengers. When the conductor came up to Einstein, he could not find his ticket. The conductor, who knew that Einstein was a great physicist, smiled and said, "Sir, I don't need to see your ticket. I know that you are one of the greatest scientists in the world. I know that you are an honest man. You don't need to show me your ticket."

A few minutes later, the conductor, completing his round, passed Einstein again. Einstein was kneeling in front of his seat, looking under the cushions to find his lost ticket. Feeling sorry for his troubles and attempting to stop Einstein from searching, the conductor said to Einstein, "Mr. Einstein, you need not worry about your ticket. I don't need to see your ticket." However, Einstein didn't give up finding his lost ticket. The conductor asked him, "Why do you need to find your ticket?" Einstein answered, "Because if I don't find that ticket, I will have no idea where I'm going."

Even though we ride on this train called life, do we know where we're going? Where is our final destination?

If we are unsure of our destination, then we must find our lost ticket. For us Christians, our ticket is Jesus Christ. Do not let go Him. This ticket clearly shows us that our final destination is Heaven.

Let us make Jesus our partner in this endeavor called life. And then surprising blessings will await us. We will succeed in everything we do. Our problems will be solved. Our interpersonal relationships will carry on smoothly like a well-oiled machine.

Pray and ask our partner and ticket to Heaven, Jesus Christ. I am going to finish my sermon after I remind you about an important bible passage. Jesus Himself stated in John 15:7: "If you abide in Me, and My word abide in you, you will ask what you desire and it shall be done for you."

Amen.

Let us pray!

Loving God, thank you for becoming our partner, Saviour, and our Lord for eternal life. We confess that we are weak, deficient, and frail. We need you as our partner in this harsh world because of coronavirus. Give us your strength to defeat evil spirits and to overcome this crisis. Help us make Jesus our partner so that we become useful and beneficial to others. Guide us and lead us to experience great success in all our comings and goings due to our partner Jesus Christ.

Gracious God, help us be reminded of our final destination, the kingdom of heaven. Help us keep our interpersonal relationship with our Lord and to remember Your word in every moment, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."

We pray in the name of Jesus!