



Going Deeper - Weekly Sermon Discussion Guide

Rooted in the Word: Philemon “Everything Has Changed”

11/14/2021

“...Although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love.” -Philemon 1:8-9a

From the moment Jesus was conceived, he made a bold, counter-cultural scandalous entrance. Being conceived of an unwed virgin, he was born a poor child's birth among the filth of a stable, and throughout his life and ministry he associated with the marginalized, the outcast, even the hated among society. He flipped cultural norms on end. And, when he rode into Jerusalem, he rode in peace on a Donkey, not on a war horse and he died a criminal's gruesome and humiliating death. He defeated sin and death by subverting it and He rose from the dead, for death and sin had no hold on Him. 1 Corinthians 1:18 says “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God” and 1 Corinthians 1:25 says “For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength” This is the “Upside Down Kingdom”. Where the ones who are blessed among us are not the wealthy, the prestigious, the popular, the famous, the pretty, or the religious ones, although there is nothing inherently wrong with these qualities, these qualities are just not what makes a person truly blessed and these qualities certainly won't bring salvation to a person...No, what makes a person blessed is counter to the popular opinion: it is the poor in spirit, the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them; it is those who mourn for they will be comforted, and those who are meek for they will inherit the earth. The ones who are blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness... the pure in heart...the peacemakers, they will be called sons of God. Jesus said blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

So, when this letter is written from Paul to Philemon, imploring this wealthy, prestigious church leader to accept, forgive, restore and welcome back (as a brother) Onesimus, Philemon's former slave who wronged Philemon in some way, it was a scandalous counter-cultural request. Paul encouraged Philemon to accept Onesimus back not as his slave, but as his equal, sharing in the brotherhood of believers. Paul implored Philemon on the basis of love to humble himself, deny his earthly status, and faithfully live out the gospel of Jesus. This letter is a reflection of what the command from Jesus looks like in action: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me”. It looks like, as Ephesians 2:14 puts it, the dividing walls of hostility being destroyed by the way we love one another, forgive one another, accept one another, include and associate with one another. It looks like a life of humility, not being swayed by the cultural pressures or popular opinion, but a life responding towards one another in Christlike love.

So, Consider:

1. What dividing walls of hostility do I see in the pervasive culture around me?
2. How am I participating in, even perpetuating, these dividing walls of hostility and how am I impacted by them?
3. In what ways do I see the relevant culture that surrounds me is counter cultural to “Kingdom of God”?

Take Action:

Take a bold step to live counter cultural to the pervasive culture around you in order to love extravagantly, include others, not follow the popular opinion, forgive, sacrifice, or say "yes" to something God has called you to that others might call "foolish". Who this week can you show radical hospitality towards? Consider stepping away from popular opinion and associate with people who are not like you and in humility, learn from them.

May the Lord Bless you and keep you,
Julie Briley