



BIBLE RADIO PRODUCTIONS

www.bibleradio.org.au

BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A1771 ~ Paul Counsels Onesimus.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

In today's *Bible Adventure*, we have the story to tell of a runaway slave. Considering around one-fifth to one-third of all people in the Roman Empire at the time of the Apostle Paul were slaves, there were probably many stories of runaway slaves in those days. But this one's different because this slave met up with the Apostle Paul while Paul was a prisoner awaiting trial in Rome.

DRAMA - [The Bible In Living Sound](#).

The Roman law was inconsistent about slavery. Wealthy masters had total power over each slave, including the option to kill them. Slaves didn't have any rights and they were considered property. There were also some people whose jobs it was to punish slaves if they had displeased their master in some way. However, some masters were very kind to their slaves, offering them rewards for loyal service. Roman owners sometimes freed their slaves – either outright or by allowing them to purchase their freedom.

Slaves were keenly aware of their inferior positions and by way of protest, sometimes tried to run away. Over time, slavery under the Romans was slowly replaced with a new economic workforce during the late empire period. These wage workers provided cheap labour without the initial cost that slave owners had to pay for slaves in the slave markets. Slavery didn't disappear in Rome through human reform or religious principle.

When we read of the conditions that many slaves had to endure, we have much to thank God for in our prayers, especially our own freedoms that most of us have today. Slaves in England were freed by an Act of Parliament in 1833 and later again in the United States, in 1865.

The Apostle Paul gave advice to slaves in 1st Corinthians, Chapter 7, that if they had the chance to gain their freedom, they should use it. But neither Paul nor any of the other apostles and leaders of the early church suggested that slaves defy or break away from their owners.

Onesimus had run away from his master. Paul tried to persuade Onesimus to return to his master and ask for his forgiveness and to take whatever punishment he would receive. Otherwise Onesimus would never be at peace in his heart because he needed forgiveness for the things he had also stolen from his master Philemon.

Philemon was a Christian who lived in the city of Colosse and he had a house church meet in his home. His slave Onesimus had stolen some of his goods before running away. Once a slave escaped from his owner, he would try to hide away as far away as possible, for if he was caught and returned, he could expect severe punishment.

Paul wrote to Philemon, asking that Philemon have mercy on Onesimus and to forgive him. Although Onesimus needed to repent and restore the stolen property if he could, Philemon needed to fully forgive Onesimus in his heart too. Both of them were now Christians brothers and equal in Christ. Slavery was indeed an evil and unjust system. In this letter, we see Paul's method of overcoming this great evil: the method of love, repentance and forgiveness between a master and his slave.

In Colossians, Chapter 3, Paul wrote: “Slaves, obey your human masters in all things; not only when they are watching you, because you want to gain their approval; but do it with a sincere heart because of your reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as though you were working for the Lord and not for people. Remember that the Lord will give you as a reward what he has kept for his people. For Christ is the real Master you serve. And all wrongdoers will be repaid for the wrong things they do, because God judges everyone by the same standard. Masters, be fair and just in the way you treat your slaves. Remember that you too have a Master in heaven.”

Paul could have kept Onesimus with him in Rome and encouraged other slaves to escape too. But Paul was already a prisoner and he would have been breaking Roman law to help any slave planning to run away.

Paul, along with Peter, didn't call for an uprising to overthrow slavery in the Roman Empire. They didn't want people to think that the Christian faith was opposed to social order and harmony. Hence, the New Testament writers told Christian slaves to do what is right. Even if they were mistreated, their conscience would be clear. In 1st Peter, Chapter 2, it says: “You servants must submit yourselves to your masters and show them complete respect, not only to those who are kind and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. God will bless you for this, if you endure the pain of undeserved suffering because you are conscious of his will. What credit is there if you endure the beatings you deserve for having done wrong? But if you endure suffering even when you have done right, God will bless you for it.”

Any uprising by slaves would do the Gospel a disservice and prove a direct threat to a Roman army-controlled government. And Rome would smash such opposition quickly with deadly force. So Peter's words to unjustly treated slaves implied suffering was to be endured *without retaliation*. Suffering in itself is not good; but the *right* response in the midst of suffering is commendable.

The condition of our hearts isn't determined by the degree of suffering or persecution that we are called to bear; it is determined by the way we respond to it. Our response to suffering shapes our character and determines our psychological and spiritual health. The Christian faith has always taught: that those who have a purpose for living are those who live purposefully.

Early Christians indirectly undermined slavery, as the Gospel gives equal worth to all people. Since the New Testament levelled all of societies' distinctions at the foot of the cross, the Christian faith was particularly attractive to slaves and lower class people. Thus, Christlike living had a gradual changing effect on society and European Christians clearly saw that owning another human being was contrary to God's intended creation and being a new creation in Christ.

Paul's prayers for Philemon included the desire that Philemon was actively witnessing to others about Christ. All believers in Christ should be actively sharing our faith. We are not meant to keep Him to ourselves. We mustn't hide our faith or remain silent, but spread the Gospel effectively and frequently. Pray for opportunities to talk about Jesus and for the Holy Spirit to guide you and help you say the right things at the right time. Pray too against Satan's stronghold of unbelief that prevents many from receiving the good news of Jesus.

Paul so loved this runaway slave that Paul offered to personally pay back whatever loss Philemon had suffered on account of Onesimus' bad behaviour. Why would Paul offer such a thing like that? Paul wanted to rejoice in a genuine reconciliation between master and slave. Paul was confident that Philemon would obey Christ in this matter, even adding that Paul knew that Philemon would do more than Paul was asking.

The greatest forgiveness and reconciliation story in world history is recorded in the Bible. When Adam and Eve were sent out of the paradise God had made for them as disobedient humans, there was no payment a person could make to pay for their sins and release themselves from Satan's kingdom. Like the runaway slave, all people living on earth were unable to find a satisfactory way back to God's presence, as God is holy and cannot tolerate sin. But God had a plan to provide His forgiveness, break the power of Satan over people's lives and reconcile the world back to Himself.

God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to earth to die as the sin-bearer for all sinners. Jesus knew that the only way for sin to be eliminated was for Him, a righteous person without sin, to bear it on our behalf. In response, we are to yield our sin to Him and take on his clothes of righteousness and internal cleansing of our hearts. We need to become new creations in Christ, with Him as our Lord and Master. Then as God's ambassadors, we are to take God's forgiveness, His judgment and His mercy, and pass the Gospel message onto others. God's love and forgiveness are His primary tools for setting the world aright and in Christ, we are to do the same as imitators of Him.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are the most important parts of the Gospel. Without forgiveness of our sins, we face eternal and complete separation from God. Anyone who dies unreconciled and separated from God, goes to a place of eternal punishment called hell, where there is no relief from the Lake of Fire, the worm that torments and the troubles that assail those there.

When a person sins against us, Satan loves to erect within us a wall against that person to prevent us loving that person as Christ loves us. Forgiveness is basically a choice that we must make to destroy that wall. Jesus died to tear down the walls caused by our sin between us and God, and we too, are required to do the same to those who wrong us.

It's often harder to forgive ourselves than to forgive others. But when God has forgiven us, we are clean. In Psalm 103, it says: "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our sins from us." We need to stop blaming ourselves for not being good enough for God, and accept the fact that our sins have been forgiven. In 1st John, Chapter 1, it says: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." God Himself doesn't even want to remember our sins, so why should we?

To receive forgiveness, we must first recognise that we have sinned against God first and foremost. We must then confess our sins to Him and believe on the Name of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins and reconciliation with God. What Jesus did on the cross, He did so that we might be forgiven. Without the blood which Jesus shed on the cross, there would be no complete forgiveness on earth for our sins or anyone else's. True repentance is the turning away from our sins and the individual sinful natures. In trusting in Jesus' power and grace, we are strengthened and protected, and have no need to continuing walking in them.

If you seem to struggle with recurring sinful habits, you may need to be set free from a demonic influence in your life. It may be necessary to fast, pray and read the Scriptures, before renouncing your sins out loud before others. We are to imitate Christ and command evil presences, strongholds and their tools to leave your life forever in the Name and authority of Jesus Christ. In praising and thanking the Lord for such deliverance, hold fast to Him, praying daily that the Lord will help you wear His armour of protection and see everything through the eyes of Jesus.

It is God's desire for us to believe on His Son Jesus for the remission of our sins, and to have a clean conscience without any guilt from our past. He wants to forgive us of our sins for HIS sake. In 1st John, Chapter 2, John says: "I write to you, my children, because your sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ."

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

< END OF SCRIPT >
