

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 1/30/94
John 15:14-17 "Are You Jesus' Friend?"

Intro: One of the toys that was pretty popular for young children this past Christmas was the Barney doll. It's a replica of the TV character "Barney the Dinosaur." We have one of the dolls in our house (hold him up). You squeeze his hand, and he talks to you. He has over 100 different personal messages. But he always begins with this one, "Hello again, to all my friends."

There's something special about friendship. No matter how young or old we may be, we long to be friends, and to have friends. A friend is someone you can be YOU with. A friend is someone who knows you as you really are, warts and all, and still loves you.

Are you a friend of Jesus?

Last week in our study of John 15, we talked about the topic of intimacy. We learned that fruitfulness is linked to intimacy, not activity. A fruitful Christian experiences intimacy in two areas of his/her life: intimacy with Christ (9-11), and intimacy with other Christians (12-13).

Intimacy is not an option. It's at the heart of a vibrant Christian life. Successful, vivacious Christians are those who have learned to make their #1 priority in life to be close to Christ, to abide in Christ, to depend upon Christ.

Is there a word which enables us to visualize intimacy? There is. It's the word that Jesus used in the verses that follow. It's the word "friend."

READ vv 12-17

Are you Jesus' friend? What's involved in being a friend of Jesus?

Proposition: As we consider John 15:14-17, we learn that being a friend of Jesus involves 3 traits.

I. Being a friend of Jesus involves Obedience (14).

II. Being a friend of Jesus involves Knowledge (15-16).

As friends of Jesus, we are privileged to know about a special...

A. We are privileged to know about a special Position (15a).

B. We are privileged to know about a special Purpose (15b).

C. We are privileged to know about a special Plan (16).

1. We have been chosen.

2. We have been chosen to bring forth fruit.

3. We have been chosen to bring forth fruit through prayer.

III. Being a friend of Jesus involves Love (17).

I. Being a friend of Jesus involves Obedience (14).

V 14 "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatever I command you."

You are my friends. What an overwhelming statement! But there's more.

You are my friends IF. That word "if" seems strange to us, doesn't it? "You are my friends IF you do." It sounds like a conditional friendship. Is it?

Check the context.

Jesus spoke these words to the 11 disciples. Judas had already left. In but a few hours, he would be back, this time with an angry, hateful mob of soldiers.

When Jesus spoke the words recorded in Jn 14-16, His aim was to prepare His followers for life after His departure. He was leaving them via the cross, and He would one day come back for them. But in the meantime, they needed instructions as to how to live.

He gave them a picture from agriculture. He said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches (5)." As branches, they needed to abide, to make a conscious, daily decision to be close to Him, to be in contact with Him. And if they would abide, He guaranteed they would bring forth fruit.

What's the key to abiding?

v 10 "If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in My love." Last week we used the picture of a Greenhouse. When a plant stays within the confines of the greenhouse, there is fruit. If it were to go outside, there would be barrenness. The commands of Jesus are like the walls of the greenhouse. When we keep Jesus' commands, we experience growth and fruitfulness.

Fruitfulness is linked to abiding, and abiding is linked to obedience.

That's why Jesus could say, "Ye are my friends IF ye do..." Friendship with Jesus is linked to obedience. A true friend of Jesus obeys Jesus.

Listen carefully. In Jn 15, disciples are said to be Jesus' friends, but Jesus is not said to be their friend (Carson, 105). In fact, can you think of anywhere in Scripture where either God the Father or the Lord Jesus is said to be a friend of anyone? True, Abraham was called the friend of God (Isa 41:8), but the Scriptures do not call God the friend of Abraham.

That seems strange, doesn't it? Especially when you think of the many hymns that use this image:

James Grindley Small: "I've found a Friend; O such a Friend! He loved me ere I knew Him; He drew me with the cords of love, and thus He bound me to Him..."

Joseph Scriven: "What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer."

J. Wilbur Chapman: "Jesus! What a Friend for sinners! Jesus! Lover of my soul; Friends may fail me, foes assail me, He, my Savior, makes me whole."

Listen to this observation by D.A. Carson (105): "All of these hymns express true ideas, and I do not hesitate to sing them. After all, the Scriptures never present Jesus as an UNfriend. If friendship is measured purely by love poured out, then Jesus is the greatest friend. Yet the fact remains that the Scriptures never refer to Him by the noun 'friend.'"

Why don't they? Think about it. Jesus says to us, "You are my friends." He doesn't say, "WE are friends." What is He offering us? Intimacy with Him, yes. Equality with Him, no. The friendship Jesus offers is not reciprocal.

Don't miss this. Friendship with Jesus doesn't mean He stoops to equal terms with us. He doesn't become our 'buddy.' We're not "chums." There's a fundamental difference between Jesus and us. He is the Creator; we are the created. He's the Redeemer; we are the redeemed. He's the King; we are the subjects.

It's that fact which explains why Jesus qualifies His offer: "Ye are My friends IF you do what I command you." Being a friend of Jesus involves Obedience. Keep in mind, we do not obey Jesus in order to BECOME His friends (we'll see how in a moment). We obey Him BECAUSE we are His friends. It's our privilege.

Illust: It's different if a stranger asked you for a favor, than a friend...

Do you delight in obeying Jesus? If you are His friend, you will.

I'll be frank. If the Christian life is a grind to you, if it cramps your style to obey the commands of Christ, then you'd better recheck whether you're Jesus' friend.

Tran: That's the first trait of a friend of Jesus: Obedience.

Q: "What are the benefits we have as friends of Jesus?"

II. Being a friend of Jesus involves Knowledge (15-16).

V 15 "Henceforth I call you not servants"

Jesus said, "Henceforth (from now on) I call you not servants." This was quite an announcement. Jesus let His followers know that they had graduated to a new level of intimacy with Him.

Why doesn't Jesus call us servants? "For the servant knoweth not..." A servant doesn't KNOW what his Lord is doing. A friend does.

Let me ask you a question. Why were the disciples no longer considered merely servants? Answer--because Jesus made something known to them. He let them know the Master's business. As friends, they were entitled to knowledge.

What kind of knowledge? As friends of Jesus, we are privileged to know about three special things...

A. We are privileged to know about a special Position (15a).

V 15 "I have called you friends."

What a special position! When we were born into the world, we certainly weren't friends of God. What were we? Just the opposite. We were enemies.

Rom 8:7 "Because the carnal mind is ENMITY against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither, indeed, can be."

James 4:4 "know ye not that friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

How does an enemy of God become a friend of God?

Rom 5:10 "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

If you have trusted in Jesus Christ, if you are His follower, you have a special position! He says to you, "But I have called you friends."

Note: A lot of people struggle with the problem of poor self-esteem. But right here in v 15 is a nugget of truth that will solve the problem. The key to a good self-image is to learn to accept what Jesus says about us. It's what Jesus says about us that matters. Not what we think. Certainly not what we feel. What He says. And what does He say about us? "I have called you friends." Oh beloved, ponder that!

We have a special position.

Q: If I'm a friend of Jesus, does it mean I am no longer His servant?

In one sense, yes, Christians are slaves of Jesus. He is the Master. We obey. Ph 1:1 "Paul and Timothy, the servants of Jesus Christ."

I Cor 4:2 "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."

But in another sense, we are no longer merely slaves, but friends. Jesus has given us a special position. As Paul said in Gal 4, we are no longer slaves, but sons.

B. We are privileged to know about a special Purpose (15b).

What purpose?

V 15b "for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you."

Suppose a king came to church here this morning. If right in the middle of the service, he ordered his chauffeur, "Go out and bring my limo to the front door," what would the chauffeur do? Would he ask for an explanation? Would he say, "Well, King, let's talk about this. Why do you want your car now, and why by the front door?" No. The chauffeur would obey his master, no questions asked.

Now suppose the king asked a close friend to get the car. No doubt the friend would get the car. He would never think of disobeying his king. But being a friend of the king, he would have the right to ask a few questions. And the king would share with him the reasons behind his command. Because he's his friend.

See the connection. A servant does not have an intimate relationship with his master. A friend does. A servant does what he's told without understanding his master's plan.

But Jesus calls us friends. He lets us in on the Father's will. Since we are Jesus' friends, we have the privilege of knowing about His special purpose.

Illust:

C. We are privileged to know about a special Plan (16).

How do we become Jesus' disciple and friend? Do we choose Him? In v 16, Jesus informs His friends about a special plan, involving 3 details...

1. We have been chosen.

V 16 "Ye have NOT chosen me, but I have chosen you"

In Israel in the 1st century, the common practice was for a disciple to pick the rabbi or teacher he wanted to follow. Remember the scene surrounding the call of the 12? Jesus went to them. He went to Peter the fisherman, and said, "Follow Me." He went to Matthew the tax-collector, and said, "Follow Me."

On earth, friends generally choose each other, but friendship with Jesus is different. It's one-sided in its origin. It's not that we met half-way. But listen to what Jesus said, "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." The "I" is emphatic in the original.

I chose you. Those words point out that the love of Christ for us is spontaneous, free, and independent, and uninfluenced. The Bible is full of statements like this that highlight the sovereign nature of divine love:

Dt 7:7-8 (To Israel) "Jehovah did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people; for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because Jehovah loves you...he had brought you out with a mighty hand."

Hosea 14:4 "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely."

Rom 5:8 "But God commends his own love for us, in that, while we were..."

Eph 1:4 "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, in order that we should be holy (not because He foresaw that we were going to be holy)."

I Jn 4:10 "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent..."

I Jn 4:19 "We love, because He first loved us."

Objection: "I don't like the doctrine of election. It makes people proud."

Well, first of all, we're in danger when we start picking and choosing doctrines based on our likes and dislikes. Secondly, the doctrine of election is one of the most humbling doctrines in Scripture when properly understood.

Here's a case in point. Jesus just informed His disciples that they were His friends. Wow! That's enough to turn anyone's head (Carson, 107). So to keep it in perspective, Jesus reminds them, "You didn't choose Me. I choose you."

D.A. Carson says it well (107), "This truth is of overwhelming importance if we hope to escape the puffy spiritual arrogance that talks almost as if Jesus has been blessed by our presence, as if we have done him a favor by choosing to trust him. I do not doubt for a moment that men are responsible to repent and believe; but it is salutary to recognize that no believer will have legitimate grounds for claiming, throughout all eternity, that he made it and his neighbor did not because he made the right choice. One of the songs that will surely be sung forever around the throne is this one:

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Savior true;
No, I was found of Thee."

As friends, we're privileged to know about this special plan. We have been chosen.

2. *We have been chosen to bring forth fruit.*

V 16 "and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit"

The word "ordained" means "appointed." It refers to the act of setting someone apart for special service (Wiersbe). Jesus has not only chosen, but He has appointed us. He's given us a Mission--to bring forth fruit. He is in heaven now, yet He lives through us.

There's a third element to this special plan.

3. *We have been chosen to bring forth fruit through prayer.*

V 16 "and whatever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He shall give it..."

We've already talked about praying in Jesus' name when we studied 14:13. We learned that praying in Jesus' name is praying in a manner consistent with Who Jesus is. When we pray in Jesus' name, we ask for things for which we know He would ask.

But notice the connection here. Prayer is the key to God's special plan. Prayer is the key to fruit. When we pray, we advance the name of Christ.

I agree with an observation I read this week by Bill Hull (Disc.Ch, 68), "Prayer attacks the status quo, striking at the root of issues, moving God's hand, and catapulting angels into action...I've heard it said that the first church prayed ten days (prior to Pentecost), preached ten minutes, and saw 3,000 come to Christ. The modern church prays ten minutes, preached ten days, and sees a handful come to Christ.

Being a friend of Jesus means we're privileged to know about the Divine Plan. And when we pray, we get in touch with that Plan.

Illust:

Tran: Being a friend of Jesus involves 3 traits: Obedience, and Knowledge (as friends, we're privileged to know about a special position, purpose, and plan).

III. Being a friend of Jesus involves Love (17).

V 17 "These things I command you, that ye love one another."

As Jesus' friends, we love Him. We love Him because He first loved us (I Jn). But as His friends, we must also love His other friends. We must love one another.

This is not the first time Jesus tells us to "love one another" (see 13:34). In v 12 He lays out the standard, "Love one another as I have loved you."

Jesus doesn't expect perfection, but He does expect imitation.

In v 16, Jesus told us, "I chose you. In v 17, He says, "I command you." Love is not an option. He calls us to be a caring community. Selfishness is out. So is self-promotion. So is self-seeking of any kind.

As friends of Jesus, we're called to love each other. What does that mean?

It means that any friend of Jesus is a friend of mine.

We're commanded to love each other. What does that mean practically?

Does this command have any bearing when I learn that a fellow Christian is in the hospital, or has lost a loved one? Or how about when I observe that a brother hasn't been to church in a couple of weeks?

Challenge: When that happens, the entire church family ought to move into action with an outpouring of love for that fellow-friend of Jesus.

Problem: A great disservice happened about a generation ago in the American church. "Let the clergy do that. They're better trained. We'll pay them to do the ministering, to show that we care."

Is that what Jesus said? No. In the body, every friend of Jesus is a minister.