

Now I Call You My Friends (John 15:11-17)

Expository Lessons from the Gospel of John

I. Background for the Farewell Discourse

- a. As we resume in the text it is Thursday night, the night before Jesus is to be crucified.
 - i. Jesus has had his Last Supper with the disciples, at which (we know from **Matthew, Mark and Luke**) He instituted the Lord's Supper with the bread and the cup.
- b. After dinner has ended and Judas has departed, but before Jesus and his disciples cross over to the Garden of Gethsemane (where Jesus will be taken prisoner), Jesus gives a lengthy and very significant talk to the apostles.
 - i. The passages we will cover in this lesson are part of that "Farewell Discourse", which we find in **John 13:31-17:26**.
- c. In our last lesson we discussed how Jesus used the parable of the Vine and Branches to explain the nature of the relationship we must have with Him in order to be saved.
 - i. He is the vine; we are the branches. Without Him we can do nothing.
 - ii. We must abide in Him: to remain in Him over time, to the end, to be saved. This calls for us to love Him and to obey His teachings.
 - iii. If we are in Him, we will be pruned (cut back, disciplined, called to repent) by the Father, so that we can become more fruitful.
 - iv. We also considered what the "fruit" that we are to bear might be referring to.
 - v. We are saved through a loving, obedient relationship with Him. We are saved through a relationship that involves both parties. Saying it *must be either all-Him or all-us* is a false dichotomy.
- d. In this lesson we will continue that teaching of Jesus, from where we left off.

II. Now I Call You My Friends (Read **John 15:11-17**)

- a. Summary of the passage.
 - i. Jesus said that the things He had just told them (that they must abide in Him, remain in an obedient relationship with Him to the end) was

so that His joy would remain in them, and that their joy would be complete.

- ii. He issues what He calls 'My commandment': that they "love one another as I have loved you."
 1. This is repeating what He had told them earlier.
 - a. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (**John 13:34-35**, NKJV)
 2. I spent time recently in the Middle East, where I came in contact with disciples who converted to the Christian faith while living in Muslim countries where it is illegal for Christians to share their faith. I was curious to find out how they became interested in the Christian faith under such hostile conditions; therefore, I asked how and why they became Christians.
 - a. One brother told me that many people in his country have heard about Jesus and they know Him as "the Prophet of love", since He spoke so much about love: loving your enemies, loving one another, forgiving one another, etc. They saw this in sharp contrast to Islam, where God is portrayed as severe: One who is primarily hard, exacting and punishing.
 - b. Another brother shared that he came to faith by seeing that the Christians he knew were honest and loving. This was very different from what he saw among his Muslim community, and drew him to the Christians. He then starting to read the Bible and came to faith.
 - iii. Jesus then explains the significance of what He had said earlier about "as I have loved you". Here He adds that the greatest possible love is to lay down one's life for his friends.
 1. They are His friends *if they do whatever He commands them*.
 2. He calls them friends now, instead of servants, since He is revealing to them what He is doing (a servant does not know what his master is doing).
 - iv. Jesus chose and appointed them (as opposed to them choosing Him) to go and bear fruit, and that that fruit should remain.

1. In order that whatever they ask the Father in His name, He may give them.
- b. **Question:** Jesus is their Lord, Master and Teacher. Here, the night before He dies, He offers them an opportunity to be His friends. Let's explore together. What does it mean to be a friend of Jesus?
 - i. The benefits of friendship with Jesus:
 1. He laid down His life *for His friends*. He died on the cross to redeem His friends from Satan's power, to set them free from sin and death.
 2. He confides in us; He tells us what He is doing, what will happen next.
 - a. We can understand mysteries that the world around us is in the dark about.
 - b. We understand about the nature of God, eternal judgment, what will happen after we die, what will happen on the Last Day, etc.
 3. He hears the requests of His friends; and He grants them.
 - ii. The condition: To be His friend, He says we must do *whatever He says*.
 1. He does NOT say, "Just believe in me."
 2. He does NOT say, "Do *most of* the things I tell you; just do the commands of mine that your church group thinks are important."
 3. Jesus defines what it means to be His friend. His friends do whatever He says.
 - a. We can't break His commands into *two lists* (things that are "salvation issues" on one list; and things that [we hope] are not essential to salvation on the other list).
 - i. When people attempt to take this approach (only obey the commands of Jesus that they think are required for salvation), they have turned a relationship with Jesus into a legalistic transaction. They think, "If I just obey the '*salvation issues*', then I can live the rest of my life as I choose, and *still make it to heaven*."

- ii. Jesus said *His friends will do everything He asks of them*, out of a loving relationship. If we are true friends of Jesus don't just obey "the big commands", the things we think are most important. We must strive to do *everything* Jesus asks of us! We love Him and He loved us.
 - b. One of the most critical commands, the one highlighted here, is that we *love one another as He has loved us*.
- 4. Note that the idea that Jesus hears and responds to the prayers of His friends, namely *those who do whatever He says*.
 - a. Consider what David had to say about the Lord hearing and responding to his prayers.
 - i. Read **2 Samuel 22:1-7** (note that this is very similar to **Psalms 18**).
 - 1. Here David recounts a time of great personal trouble; how he cries out to God and God hears his cries and prayers.
 - b. **Question:** According to David, why did the Lord delight in him, listen to his prayers, and rescue him from his trouble?
 - i. Read **2 Samuel 22:14-25**.
 - ii. David said it was because of his righteousness, and the cleanness of David's hands.
 - 1. As opposed to men like Luther who claim that there is no righteousness in us, that all of our righteous deeds are "like filthy rags", misapplying **Isaiah 64:6** (directed at the wicked religious people then in Israel) to the entire human race.
 - iii. David says it was because he kept the ways of the Lord and did not (at that point in his life) depart from God or His statutes.
 - iv. Some might consider David proud or self-righteous for uttering such words. Yet David's writing here was inspired by the Holy Spirit!

- v. Consider David's spiritual condition as a young man. God selected David from all his brothers to be king of Israel *because David was a man after God's own heart.* (**1 Samuel 13:14**)
- c. This is the same thing James writes in the New Testament, pointing back to the example of Elijah from **1 Kings 17-18**.
 - i. Read **James 5:13-18**
 - 1. Confess our sins to one another.
 - 2. Fervent prayer *of a righteous man* avails much, just as it did in the example of Elijah!
- d. God listened to David's, Elijah's, and Jesus' prayers because they were leading righteous lives: living obediently to God's commands.
 - i. Of course, sometimes God does not answer our prayers (or answers "no"), as He did when Jesus prayed three times in the Garden of Gethsemane that the cup of suffering be taken from Him. However, Jesus also prayed then *that God's will be done.*
 - ii. However, if we want God to hear and answer our prayers, we must be serious about living righteous lives, living obedient to Jesus' commands.
 - iii. This is exactly what Jesus tells us in **John 15**: that our prayers will be heard and answered according to God's will if we are Jesus' friends.
 - iv. In fact, Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God, where He "always lives to make intercession" for His friends who are struggling here on earth. (**Hebrews 7:23-8:2** and **Psalm 110:1-4**)
 - v. What an incredible blessing and opportunity available to us – *if we are Jesus' friends* as He defines such friendship.

iii. Imaginary friends?

1. Sometimes small children create in their imagination an “imaginary friend” who keeps them company (perhaps when they are feeling afraid or lonely). Generally, they know this “friend” is not real. Whether this is healthy and normal in small children or not, is up for debate.
2. However, many adults are doing the same with Jesus, creating their own imaginary Jesus who is their imaginary friend.
 - a. This “imaginary friend Jesus” makes them feel better when they are alone or afraid.
 - b. They can go to church and sing songs and sway and have an emotional experience with this imaginary friend, along with other people who bring their own imaginary friends with them.
 - c. This “imaginary Jesus” does not insist that they do whatever He says. He demands nothing but belief and emotional feel-good “worship experiences”. He does not insist on laying your life down for others. He does not demand repentance from sin, a holy life, and obeying *whatever* he commands.
 - d. Those who maintain “imaginary friends” into adulthood are considered mentally sick people. Out of touch with reality. However, many churches are full of these people; and the preachers don’t want to burst their bubbles by bringing in the *real* Jesus.
 - e. The challenge for those preaching and teaching the Word of God: bring *the real Jesus* into the church. Make Him known so people can understand what Jesus expects of them, so that they too can have the opportunity to obey His teachings and become His friend.
 - i. They can only obey His teachings if they first know what those teachings. Then the disciples need to be called to *put into practice everything* He commands.
 - f. On the Day of Judgment, the real Jesus will be separating people out as sheep from goats. He will say to the lawless, “away from me, I never knew you”.

- c. The call for us is to love one another *as He loved us*, His friends.
- i. We can't limit this to just immediate family members of our own group or denomination. However, certainly our *first* priority should be to take care of family members in need.
 1. Speaking of children taking care of elderly parents, Paul said: "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (**1 Timothy 5:8**, NKJV)
 - ii. Read **1 Corinthians 13:1-13**.
 1. (In the midst of a discussion about miraculous gifts, Paul emphasizes that love is much more important than any of them.)
 2. The character of love is the character of self-sacrifice. This is extremely demanding! This passage describes what real love is like. It is patient, not seeking its own, not provoked, thinking no evil, bearing all things, enduring all things, etc.
 3. Real love is about how we treat others.
 4. Love from the heart, and our actions are to follow from that.
 5. This is hard. There are many do well on separation from the world, yet who fail to put in practice Jesus' commandment to love others.
 6. Just like having an imaginary Jesus, we can have imaginary love (just a warm feeling inside, with no substance to back it up)!
 - iii. Read **1 John 3:10-24**
 1. This passage is very similar to what **John 15** tells us about abiding in Jesus: we must practice righteousness and love our brothers.
 - a. It can be very difficult to do both.
 - b. Some groups/people are really good at practicing righteousness (avoiding obvious sins) but are not loving. Some Christians have the opposite problem (loving people but failing to live holy lives). We can't specialize in one or the other; *we must do both!*
 2. Don't be like Cain; don't hate your brother who is more righteous (in any area of life) than you are.

3. We must put love into action. It is not just a feeling.
 - a. Love with action and truth!
 - b. *Show people love by what you are doing.*
 - c. If we have something and others do not, we need to help them out. This is genuine love.
- iv. James makes the same point about loving by what we do, not just imaginary love. Read **James 2:5-17**.
 1. Note that this famous passage on faith and works (action) is within a discussion about loving others and helping those in need.
- v. Read **Matthew 25:31-46**
 1. If we want to follow Jesus, we must be feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, taking in strangers, visiting those in prison, etc.
 2. At the same time, if someone is lazy or irresponsible, we don't want to be contributing to that! Consider what Paul, the 'Apostle of Love' *who wrote 1 Corinthians 13*, had to say in his letter to the Thessalonians:
 - a. "But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread." (**2 Thessalonians 3:6-12**, NKJV)
 - b. Note also that although Paul had the right to financial support, he worked hard to support *himself in order to*

set an example of hard work, because he knew there were lazy people in the church.

- c. We do *not* need to be supporting or sharing our possessions with people who are lazy or irresponsible. In those cases, the loving thing to do is to call them to repent and not subsidize their sinful lifestyle.
 - d. Discerning the difference between those in genuine need versus those who have been lazy or irresponsible is not always easy! We need to pray for wisdom here.
- vi. Special call for the rich to love others.
1. “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.” (**1 Timothy 6:17–19**, NKJV)
 2. We all need to wrestle with our wealth and money and all that Jesus teaches: to provide for ourselves, our family members, and to be generous to others.

III. Conclusions

- a. Jesus, the Son of God, through whom the universe was made, opens the door to become His friends.
- b. Being a friend of Jesus brings many blessings (revealing wonderful things to us, protection, deliverance, eternal life, interceding to answer our prayers, etc.)
- c. However, being a real friend also has responsibilities. To be Jesus’ friend we must do whatever He says. That includes loving others as He loved us (laying down His life).
 - i. Don’t make the mistake of having an “imaginary friend” Jesus. That will do you no good on the Day of Judgment when you meet the real one.
- d. Loving one another as He loved us is an essential command. It involves action, sacrifice on our part.
- e. Our goal should be to live our lives in such a way that when Jesus returns, He will recognize us as His friends.