

THE GOSPEL OF BELIEF - Studies in John's Gospel

Part fifty-seven - Sunday, September 21st, 2014, 10:00 a.m.

Teaching #1751 - Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church

WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS

John 15:12-17 - "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. [13] Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. [14] You are my friends if you do what I command you. [15] No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. [16] You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. [17] These things I command you, so that you will love one another."

The title I chose for this teaching grows out of the great **name change** these first disciples receive from Jesus in **verse 15** - "**No longer do I call you servants**, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but **I have called you friends**, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."

When Jesus says "**I have called you friends**," He's likely referring directly to His words in **verse 14** - "**You are my friends if you do what I command you**." And the reason I point this out is there is obviously something very strange going on here. Think about it. In **verse 14** He calls them His friends specifically on the condition that they **do what He tells them** - "**You are my friends if you do what I command you**"(14).

Then, in **verse 15** He tells them because He has chosen to call them **friends** they are no longer **servants** - "**No longer do I call you servants**, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but **I have called you friends**, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you"(15).

Here's where this leaves us. We're friends of Jesus specifically because we do what we're told. And precisely because we are such obedient disciples, Jesus no longer considers us **servants**, but rather **friends**. We are **friends** and no longer **servants** because we do exactly what we're told. Are we being tricked here? We have to address this strange logic in this teaching. The only conclusion I can reach is **both** friends and servants obey, but they obey for totally different **reasons**. And Jesus wants the **devout** obedience of **friends**, not **constrained** obedience of **slaves**.

There's more. Strikingly, when these very Apostles write about their relationship with their Lord (in New Testament documents) they **never** refer to Jesus as their "**friend, Jesus**." "**What a Friend we Have in Jesus**" isn't in the New Testament. These very Apostles constantly and universally refer to themselves as "**slaves**" and "**servants**" of Jesus Christ in every written document we possess. Were they ignoring these words from Jesus in our text? Were they disobedient? And how does their insistence that they were Jesus' **servants** mesh with Jesus calling them **friends** instead of **servants**?

1) JESUS GIVES DISCIPLES HIS VERTICAL GRACE AND HIS HORIZONTAL COMMAND

John 15:12-13 - "This is my commandment, **that you love one another as I have loved you**. [13] Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."

We need to start by admitting this is perhaps the most difficult command of all - **John 15:12** - "**This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you**."

We know how unlovable most people are because we know how miserably proud and self-willed and unlovable **we** are. This is why people love their **dogs** so much. We ramble on about how they give us **unconditional** love. And what we all know we **mean** by that is they are so much easier to please than **people**. And we know that because, while we've never been a **dog**, we know from our own hearts what know-it-all, proud, and determined **people** can be like. Loving people is hard because people are just like us.

The command from our Lord is we must love each other as we have been loved by our Lord - "**...love one another as I have loved you**"(12). This command is the divine rationale behind the Communion service. It's not a mere love for liturgy that motivated Jesus to insist we keep partaking of it **together** until He returned - "**...you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes**"(1 Cor.14:26b).

Why is Paul so insistent that these people **wait for each other** rather than each partaking before the others arrive (1 **Corinthians 11:21**)? Why can't each one just remember the Lord's death in his or her private devotional time? Why is this ordinance of Communion so important to the very definition of a church body? I know Jesus died for me. I don't need a

crowd to remember that.

But that's not all the Lord's Supper is about. The Lord's Supper isn't just about remembering Jesus died for me. That's very important, but it's not the whole of its meaning. Jesus institutes the Lord Supper in such a way that I'm forced to remember His great sacrificial love for **me** while I'm breaking that bread with **you**.

Jesus knows how easy it is for me to rejoice in His **love** for me while I'm demanding my **rights** from you. He knows I can rejoice in His unbelievably kind **grace** for **my** sins while I'm demanding **justice** be brought to bear on **your** sins.

Look again at Jesus' command in our text - **John 15:12** - "**This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.**" Every non-loving act of a disciple of Jesus is an act of obscene **forgetfulness**. Or, in the language of John 15, I'm no longer "**abiding in the vine**" of Christ's love and grace. When I am not forgiving and sacrificially loving others in the body of Christ I have somehow ceased living near the cross of my own redemption. "Jesus, keep me near the cross," indeed.

Christ's love **received** is to be the fuel for Christ's love **extended**. And we'll look specifically at how this is to be developed in just a few moments in **verse 15**. But I need to deal with a potential misunderstanding of what I've just been saying. When Jesus commands that we love each other as He has loved us **He doesn't mean we are to ignore sin in the body of Christ**. Jesus is never pleased when we **ignore** sin. After all, He didn't **ignore** our sin. He died on account of it.

When Jesus commands, "**....that you love one another as I have loved you**"(15:12), He's confronting my inclination to **not** forgive people who have wronged me because I'm stirred up by what they've done. I'm hurt. I'm embarrassed. My family has been mistreated.

Of course, both Jesus and Paul remind us that when there's proven immorality and wickedness in the church there are times the church must deal with such members. But Jesus is after a much more subtle and common problem in our John 15 text. He's reminding me when someone wrongs **me personally** I am not the one who has to make that person pay for his or her sin. **Jesus** is the one who has to pay for that sin.

Remember, this is not a matter of **pretending** this person did me no wrong. I'm not covering up or ignoring that sin. I'm just remembering that if God's grace reached into **my dirty little heart** I can extend the same kind of love and grace to **another dirty little heart**. Jesus knows my **love** will do more good than my **revenge**. It might just open up that heart to the miracle of God's grace as well.

Save your intolerance for when **God's** rights as Creator of all are trampled, not your rights. Be passionate when **others** are sinned against rather than when **you're** sinned against. That's the essence of loving others as we have been loved by our Lord.

2) SO WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FRIENDS AND SERVANTS? RETURNING TO THE HARD QUESTION

John 15:13-15 - "**Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. [14] You are my friends if you do what I command you. [15] No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.**"

Some of you might remember that I said a few minutes ago we needed to work through exactly how we are to develop and nourish loving others as we have been loved by our Lord. I said this was a hard command. How can we possibly live like this?

Sometimes it helps just to break down a cluster of verses into its most simple and direct thoughts. When I look at **verses 13-15** here's what I know for certain: We have been **loved like friends** (13). It is absolutely imperative we **obey all the commands of Jesus** (14). The change from being called **servants** to **friends** isn't a change in **obedience**, but a change in **knowledge and motivation** (15).

Let's put this all together. It is still imperative I obey the commands of Jesus - especially His hard command that I love fellow Christians as Jesus has loved me. But, and this is important, having been loved so graciously by Jesus, I don't obey Jesus as a servant. By that I mean my obedience isn't **bare** obedience. It's not just an **assignment**. Something has changed with the death of Jesus on the cross. This change is what Jesus is announcing when He says in **verse 15** - "**No longer do I call you servants....**" He sees His impending crucifixion as the **cause** of this switch from calling them **servants** to calling them **friends** - "**I don't call you servants after this point.**" That's what Jesus means in **verse 15** when He says "**No longer do I call you**

servants.” Something is changing from this point on.

Jesus’ point is His death on the cross doesn’t just **pardon my sins**. It **motivates my obedience**. But how - **how** does it do this? That’s where the rest of **verse 15** is so important - **John 15:15** - **“No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”**

This is Jesus’ final twenty-hours on earth. The veil of that majestic temple will soon be split by divine hand from top to bottom. Jesus has explained His redemptive mission to the disciples - **“....all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (15)**. These disciples, more than anyone else on earth, know they didn’t **earn** this mission from Jesus. They barely **understood** it.

As they receive this awareness Jesus calls them **friends**. Again, they’re not calling **Jesus** their friend. It’s **Jesus’** love for **them** that’s being emphasized. And Jesus wants them to **relish** this new awareness. Jesus wants them being **nourished** by it like a branch getting life from a vine. The big idea here is regardless how unworthy and ragged these disciples are, Jesus is dying for them - just as they are.

And that love must constantly **amaze** them. They must never stop **drawing on it - like a branch in a vine**. It must constantly fill all their vision. Jesus - God Almighty in human flesh - calls them His **friends**. He’s not frowning at them in their sins. He’s **pardoning** them.

This is their new motivation in all they do. They stand in the love of Jesus and move out from that starting point into the world around them. And in case you hadn’t noticed, this is the theology of the whole New Testament. Paul took these words of Jesus very seriously:

Romans 12:1 - **“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”**

Everything starts with the **“mercies of God.”** And the place where we **receive** those mercies is the cross of Jesus Christ, God the Son. Don’t do **anything** in your daily Christian walk that doesn’t start with rejoicing in the love and mercy of God. There is no other good starting place for ministry, giving, worship, confession, prayer, or anything else. **Do** obey Jesus in **everything**. And do it because your heart has been settled and redeemed with His love.

One more thing. Look at those arresting words in the middle of **verse 15** - **“....for the servant does not know what his master is doing....”**It’s possible to attempt following Jesus without deeply feeding on His redemptive love. You can read your Bible, go to church, sing the songs, take communion, and give to missions - all without **knowing what the master is doing - what His heart is full of and longing for**.

I can try to please Jesus and still **misunderstand** Jesus. I can miss His heart. Or, more in line with today’s text, I can be unforgiving and cold to another believer, all the while pretending I’m authentically standing in God’s grace to me as a Christian. And to all such ones our Lord would lovingly say, **“You just don’t know what I’m doing. You don’t know me at all!”**

3) **THE ABIDING FRUIT OF THOSE CHOSEN BY OUR LORD**

John 15:16-17 - **“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. [17] These things I command you, so that you will love one another.”**

This is the third time John refers to the choosing of these twelve apostles:

John 6:70 - **“Jesus answered them, ‘Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.’”** Jesus makes clear He didn’t just choose eleven of the twelve. They were **all** chosen as apostles. Judas wasn’t **less** chosen than the others. Being **chosen** didn’t guarantee eternal security. Jesus was talking about chosenness for Apostolic assignment. Not salvation.

John 13:18 - **“I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’”**Again, Jesus wants them to know He wasn’t taken by **surprise** by Judas’ actions. He knew the chosen twelve inside out from the very beginning.

Then, today's text: **John 15:16** - "***You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide....***" Through these chosen apostles would come something **abiding** for the church. We'll consider this in a moment.

Luke 6:12-13 - "***In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. [13] And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles....***" So important was the choosing of the twelve Jesus prayed all night before choosing them for their apostolic role.

But why this choosing? What was so important to Jesus. And what was the "**abiding fruit**" we have received from them? **You're reading it this morning!** We have the record of the gospel. We have the very words of our Lord, permanently recorded. We have the Epistles - precious instruction to the church. We have the sure prophecy of what's to come at the end of the age.

So successful was our Lord's choosing that the church has stood on this foundation for two thousand years. We have the "**faith once delivered**" to the saints.

There's more. We have the **apostolic mission** - the **taking of the gospel into the whole world**. And for this we have **ongoing provision** - **John 15:16** - "***You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.***"

We have the **content** of our mission to the world in the abiding fruit of the Apostles' record. But that's not all. We are also promised the **resources** needed as we **carry that message** into a hostile world. Every Christian takes the **same** message in the **same** power. That's what Jesus meant when He left the church **these** famous words:

Matthew 28:18-20 - "***And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'***"