

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Belonging to Jesus: My Friends - John 15:14-15; 14:1-3

“Friend: a person with whom one is on terms of mutual affection, a helper or sympathiser”; so runs the dictionary.

I remember as a child, along with my brother and sisters, sometimes being given the privilege of reading the daily portion of the Bible to the rest of the family. Interestingly, whenever we children chose the verses to read, as often as not, they contained the name of the individual doing the reading. So, the story of David and Jonathan was always a favourite with me. It still is. I guess instinctively we all wanted to feel that we mattered to God, that having our names in the Bible made us that bit more important. Well, we all do matter to God, and the story of David and Jonathan, perhaps the two greatest friends in the entire Bible, teaches us much about the matter of friendship. We see on the one hand, David ready to put his life on the line for Jonathan. His father had sent him to the battle lines to find out how his older brothers were getting on. There he hears the Philistine giant Goliath challenge the armies of God. So, as no other was willing, he goes out to meet him alone, and emerges victorious. On the other hand, this bravery is fully recognised and reciprocated, as Jonathan gives to David the symbols of his princely standing. Perhaps even at that early stage in their friendship, Jonathan realised that God had chosen David, and marked him out for special service. The affection that they had for each other is clear:

“So Jonathan said to David, ‘Whatever you yourself desire, I will do it for you’” (1 Samuel 20:4). “Jonathan was slain in your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; you have been very pleasant to me; your love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women,” (2 Samuel 1:26) was David’s lament on the death of Jonathan. It is all the more remarkable, in that the friendship was completely free of the jealousy that Jonathan might have harboured towards David, viewing him as a potential threat to his own succession.

Today we shall look at the marvellous relationship that we have been brought into, with the Lord Jesus. We will read from the Gospel of John 15:13-15. “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.”

In a sense, the bond of friendship is the strongest relation there is. My children will always be my children, no matter what they do. It is a fact of genetics and birth. It requires no work, although obviously for that relationship to be enjoyed, it does take work from both sides. My wife and I made a promise to each other “until death us do part”. Whilst this relationship takes more work to make it all it could be, still there is an underlying promise that reinforces all that we do, binding us together. But with friends it is different. There is nothing holding the two together, except the mutual attraction that both have for each other. You can’t really have a one-sided friendship. It really does take two! And yet, here we have Jesus entering in to a relationship with us based upon mutual attraction. Of course He is our Lord, our Saviour, our Redeemer and much more, but these are all one-sided. They are what He is irrespective of us. But as friends, He is, as it were, taking a massive gamble on us.

There is, however, a big responsibility put on us also. You see, no friendship can survive if it is all give on one side and all take from the other. So often in our Christianity, we ask what is in it for me? We like to see how things affect us, and what we can gain from a particular verse. Now sometimes that is no bad thing, but this morning we need to see first of all what is in it for Him. What does Jesus get out of being friends with me? Let us forget ourselves and see what we can give freely to Him for His good and blessing, before we look at the blessings for us from being His friends.

Just before we look more closely at our three verses, it seems right to sound a mild note of caution. He, in His goodness, has called us His friends. But that familiarity should not breed contempt. He is not our pal, a good mate! In just the same way that we should always remember that God is our Father, but that our Father is also God, so it seems appropriate to maintain a reverence and respect for the person of the Lord Jesus, as we consider His friendship with us. As my wife often says to our children, “You’re not in the school playground now!” So then, these three verses from John 15 seem to teach us three vitally important truths, as regards our friendship with Jesus. Firstly, we see the basis for friendship – sacrifice. Then we see our response to friendship – obedience. And finally, we discover the privileges of friendship – intimacy.

Basis for friendship – sacrifice.

The supreme example of friendship, Jesus says, is for a man to lay down his life for his friends. Few, who have heard the story of Captain Scott of the Antarctic, will not also of heard about Oates, his companion. On the return journey, he suffered badly from frostbite, so much so that he could walk only very badly. He realised he was slowing the rest of the party down, and so one day, in the middle of a storm, he got up and hobbled out of the tent where they were sheltering, with the words "I may be some time." He walked out to die, with no intention of coming back. Through the annals of warfare there must be many similar stories of heroism, and sacrifice. But set against all these, one example rises uniquely, supreme. You see the friendship we now enjoy with Jesus was forged by His sacrifice for us when we were at enmity with Him. As Paul puts it in Romans 5:8-10: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us ... For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Long before we showed any inclination to friendliness towards God, He saw in us a character with whom He wanted to be friends. But we were not free to become His friends for we were in slavery to sin. So Jesus went to the slave market and paid the price for our redemption. He purchased us so that now we belong to Him. But while this immeasurably improved our situation, it did not match up to what He wanted. For while we belonged to Him, a servant belonging to His master, there was still a barrier to friendship. I remember a week or two after getting my first job, I was invited to the boss's house for a meal. The food was great, but I was always on edge, feeling that I was on probation. A couple of weeks later, I was again invited out for a meal, but this time to the home of a couple from church. What a difference in the atmosphere! I was able to relax, not feeling that I was being watched all the time. So Jesus redeems us and then sets us free. The words "I no longer call you servants" are the death knell to our servitude, and the call to friendship, freely given. His aloneness and rejection bought our friendship. He laid down His life, so that He might take us up as friends. He gave up everything, His life included, so that He could call me His friend. How small should that make me feel, and how exalted! I never did get to see Mel. Gibson's film "The passion of the Christ". By all accounts it was a pretty violent and horrific, if accurate, interpretation of the physical crucifixion of Jesus. That is how much He values our friendship. But beyond the physical suffering was the shame of being "hung upon a tree", of being betrayed and rejected, even by His own, and dying alone. That is how much He wants my friendship. And then, far outweighing all that had gone before, was the horror of becoming my sin bearer, and being abandoned by God, taking in His own body the fury and anger of judgement from a righteous God. There really are no limits to the sacrifice that He has made so that He could call us His friends.

Having passed an exam, and paid my annual subscription, I can call myself a Fellow of the Institute of Biomedical Science. Wherever I go, if I meet other Fellows, I immediately have a bond with them. The basis of our friendship is a mutual interest in laboratory medicine. It may not be much, but it is a start. It certainly doesn't cost very much, a few pounds and a few hours study. On such trifles, we make friends. But Jesus takes us up as friends on the basis of His precious blood poured out in death. That is how much our friendship matters to Him. If we have, in any measure, a sense of what it cost Him so that we could become His friends, then we will not take this relationship lightly.

Our response to friendship – obedience.

"You are My friends if you do whatever I command you." Here we have our side to the relationship. We display our friendship to Him through obedience. The cost paid allows for no other form of response. This is no casual relationship where a birthday card and the occasional chat will do. No, friendship with Jesus cost Him everything. It pretty much ought to cost us everything too. It is an exclusive friendship, in that it allows for no intruders. "Friendship with the world is enmity with Christ", we read in James 4:4. Those are strong words, and leave us with a stark choice. Where does our friendship lie? Is it with the One who has given Himself for us? Or is it with a system that will rob us blind and hang us out to dry! I don't suppose there will be a single believer in heaven whose cry is "I wish I had been on closer terms with the world!" Today, we need to make up our minds as to where our friendship lies. But we can be sure that there will be a cost involved. After his defeat of Agag, Saul disobeyed God, and then tried to make it up by offering sacrifices. Samuel had some devastatingly simple words to say to Saul afterwards: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22). What Jesus wants from us today is not a lively praise and worship session, nor some great sacrificial gift, but obedience. Am I doing what His word says? Am I doing it in the way that His word says? These are simple questions, but so often we fall down in one way or another. Of course, His commands cover all that His word tells us to do, and much more besides as guided by the Holy Spirit. But in particular we have His command/request, "Remember Me". There can be no excuse for a believer not humbly taking their place at His supper, taking the bread and the wine and remembering the sacrifice He has made for us. It should be our highest priority in life.

Then we also have His new commandment: to love one another, as He has loved us. When my wife and I started going out together, I rapidly found myself drawn into a whole new circle of friends. Those whom she liked were to become my friends also, because she liked them. Dear friends, how do you think it makes Jesus feel when he sees two of His friends quarrelling, especially about Himself. How uncomfortable we must make Him feel when two of His

friends won't even talk to each other! If we are serious about wanting His friendship, rather than just playing with it, then today, if there is a fellow believer with whom you don't get on, contact them now and apologise. What does it matter whose fault it is? How petty! What matters is how Jesus feels, and if there is something that I can do to make Him feel better, then ought I not to do it? Are there divisions unattended? Are there harsh words or wrong actions not apologised for? To put it simply, if I have fallen out with another believer then we can share a common Saviour. We can share a common Lord. But we cannot, either of us, call Him our Friend, and that is a great loss. Is any argument worth losing that friendship? I think not. So don't wait for the end of this broadcast. Go and do something about it now.

Sometimes we do not love another by neglect, rather than by disagreement. The love of Jesus was always a very positive thing. It is never too soon for us to look for opportunities to over-abundantly love someone else. Oh, that we truly could take up the words of Jonathan again this morning, and say them without hypocrisy to the Lord, "Whatever you yourself desire, I will do it for you" Even cranky brother Jonathan, I'll get along with him for your sake, Lord Jesus.

Privileges of Friendship – Intimacy.

Most of us will have experienced that time when we have had some really good news that we have been so eager to share with our best friend. Something that just could not wait. Something that was too important to be kept a secret any longer. Well, as those whom He has called His friends, we have been let into the secret of relationship with Him. There are things that we as believers have been brought to know, that nobody else knows about. It's not just that unbelievers know nothing about the heart and mind of God, but even such great servants of God as we read about in the Old Testament, were left in the dark. There are many things that friendship with Jesus has revealed to us but suffice to look at just two of them this morning.

In John 14, Jesus had told His disciples that He was going away, but that if He went, He would come again "that where I am, there you may be also." The beautiful, exciting truth that Jesus is coming again should thrill and motivate us until He returns. Perhaps today He will return, and we shall see His face as we meet Him in the clouds. Perhaps today we will hear the voice that said "Mary" call our name also. Perhaps before we go to bed tonight, we will lose all need for rest, for we shall have entered into our eternal rest, at home, forever with the Lord. As we consider this truth, we can do no better than let Paul's words ring out in our minds: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

The second aspect of the intimacy of friendship with Christ is summed up by Paul in Colossians 1:26-27: "The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." What a mind-boggling secret we have been brought into! Christ living in us, the sure certainty of the glory that is to come. One of the things that the web site "Friends reunited" shows is how easy it is to lose touch. It's not that we deliberately set out to get away from those we went to school with, for example. Just with one thing and another, roads take divergent ways and, without realising it, we no longer know anything of once close friends. However, when we consider our friendship with Jesus, there is no risk that we will ever grow apart. Why? Because He has chosen to indwell us, and His presence in each believer guarantees a secure future of nearness to Him, enjoying the displayed excellence of God. No matter how hard we try to visualise what His home is like, we will always fall woefully short. There is truly nothing more wonderful than knowing that right now, He is in us, and shall remain until the day when we shall be with Him. There is absolutely no risk of us growing apart so long as we remain obedient to Him.

As we have considered all that He has done for us, His sacrifice and the intimacy that follows, truly we can sing "What a friend we have in Jesus." But as we realise what an immense privilege is ours, we should also resolve, by our obedience, to bring something to the relationship, so that He can truly count each of us as one of His friends! Let us make it our aim to be able to echo the words of Jonathan, as we say to our friend "Whatever You Yourself desire, I will do it for You."

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