

04/10/11

Friend Request #5 – Joining the Celebration

- I'd like to begin our time this morning with a question...
- Is the Christian life like a jar of marbles?...
- or is it like a bowl of molasses?...

- in other words...is the Word of God a bunch of separate categories that never touch one another...or is it a body of truth...where one principle can only be completely understood in light of what scripture says about other things?...
- here's a random example...take the subject of marriage...
 - we could construct a theology of marriage...everything the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, specifically says about marriage...and that would be an important body of material for sure...
 - but even if you knew all of that, could it be completely understood and applied apart from what Scripture says about other subjects?...
 - other subjects, for example...about what Scripture tells us about the Holy Spirit?...
- are those two subjects like separate marbles...
 - so here's everything the Bible says about marriage...and here's everything the Bible says about the Holy Spirit...but it was never intended to touch, or intersect, or interact, or interplay...
 - or would you say – no, subjects in the Bible are not like marbles at all—they're like molasses...it all fits together...

- and, for a little hint on those two specific examples we just used – marriage and the Holy Spirit – if we looked at one of the clearest passages in the NT on marriage, Ephesians 5:22-33 -- is it significant that what precedes those verses is a very thorough discussion of the issue of being filled with the Spirit...
- and do you need to understand and act on one before you're really prepared to understand and act on the other?...marbles [separate categories] or molasses [it all fits together]?...

- here's another way to think about it...is the Christian life like this?...[pic of a plate with separate compartments]...or is it like this [pic of a casserole]...
 - did you ever have a child who never wanted his/her food to touch?...and had to have everything separated on the plate and who ate all their beans, then all their potatoes, then all their meat...but who could never mix it up?...
 - and at some point you had to have the...let me explain how this all gets mixed up after you eat it speech?...
 - but some Christians are like that...their lives are very compartmentalized...and in some cases...it's not just...one biblical topic from another...it's one area of life from another...
 - I've had people say to me – I'm a Christian...and I'm a businessman...but don't expect me to mix those two subjects...
 - and the way some supposed Christians run their businesses...it's very obvious that they don't mix them...
- in fact, for some people, do you know what their favorite invention was...[pic of Tupperware containers...]...
 - because they love to keep things separate...

- one more way of thinking about this and then we'll tie it together...I've used this metaphor before, but it's important...
 - is the Christian life more like this [person reading a cookbook]...
 - or like this [person reading a novel]...?
- in other words, when we study scripture are we following one set of instructions for the accomplishment of one particular project?...[here's the way we communicate...or here's the way we solve conflicts...]
 - or is there an overarching storyline of God glorifying Himself through redeeming His people by the provision of His dear Son?...
 - and does that storyline weave its way through each and every topic and category in a way that divinely ties them together in a Christ centered, gospel focused fashion?...
- what's the answer to all those questions?...
 - marbles or molasses?...molasses...
 - food never touches or a big ole casserole?...casserole...
 - cookbook or novel?...novel...
- so Tupperware is a great thing for the kitchen – it's a terrible thing for the Christian life...
 - understanding the way key topics intersect is a very important skill that every Christian needs to develop...
- now, why am I asking you about that this morning...
 - we're two weeks away from Easter, and although the subject of the gospel---the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ should never be far from our hearts and minds, that should especially be true at this time of year...the great celebration that the tomb is empty and Jesus Christ is alive...
 - we're also in the middle of a special series right now entitled Friend Request...what the Bible says about the art of friendships...
- here's my question for you this morning...is there any connection between those two concepts...
 - Easter, and our relationships with other people...
 - is there such a thing as Gospel centered friendships?...
 - and is it possible that one of the reasons we struggle with people is that we haven't fully joined in the celebration of the victory Christ won at the cross...
- with that question in mind, please open your Bible this morning to Philippians chapter 2...page 154 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
 - I would strongly encourage everyone in our church family to make the most of this time of year...it really is the high point of the calendar for a follower of Christ...
 - for you, that might include reading the latter portion of each of the Gospels and meditating on the final days of Jesus on the earth...
 - revisit the Garden of Gethsemane...observe the betrayal of Judas and watch the disciples all forsake the Lord...
 - consider the trials and the scourging and mocking and the crown of thorns...
 - walk with Christ as He is forced to carry His own cross and listen to the sound of the nails...
 - look at the 2 thieves...and the soldiers casting lots for his clothes...and John, and Mary...
 - listen to the conversations...father, forgive them for they know not what they do...
 - woman, behold your son---son, behold your mother...
 - my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?
 - into thy hands I commend thy Spirit...

- think about the three days...imagine Easter Sunday morning...the incredible joy of the angel's announcement that He is not here, he has risen just as He said...
- if you're new to studying Scripture...you might want to consider reading a Harmony of the Gospels...where the information from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are arranged in chronological order...you can find electronic versions on-line or there's all sorts of print versions available...
- [show pics] -- you also might want to read (or re-read) a book on the gospel in the next 2 weeks...like the Gospel Primer by Milton Vincent or the Cross Centered Life by CJ Mahaney or Counsel from the Cross by Elyse Fitzpatrick...
- then I would encourage you to do this – think about every topic you possibly can...through the lens of the gospel...
 - what does gospel centered work look like?...
 - what does gospel centered parenting look like?...
 - what does gospel centered entertainment look like?...gospel centered studying?...
 - gospel-centered facebook...you name it...
- and you might say – that sounds odd – do we really have biblical justification for such an endeavor?... Looking at everything through the lens of the Gospel?...
- here's what's about to happen in Philippians two...
 - we're about to have a healthy serving of molasses...a big slice of casserole...a chapter from a novel...
 - because Paul is going to mix the subjects of the gospel and friendships....
 - it's all about Joining in the Celebration...
- read Phil. 2:1-18...
- we're talking this morning about Joining in the Celebration...and with the time we have remaining, let's look for 3 principles to help us develop gospel-centered friendships.

I. Celebrate the Position You Enjoy in Christ

- verse 1 is an unusual construction and it would be easy to pass it over because we don't usually communicate that way today...
- but that would be a big mistake because it really sets up everything we're studying about friendships this morning...
- I won't bore you with all the linguistic background, but here's the short version...there are four issues raised in verse one, and Paul is using a construction here that just as easily could be translated "since", or "because"...
- he's not doubting whether there's any encouragement in Christ, or whether there's really any consolation of love...
- everything in verse 1 is a wonderful way to think about various blessings of the gospel...
 - and we know that's what Paul is doing because if you glance back at verses like chapter 1 verse 27, he says so explicitly...
 - 1:27 – Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ
 - 1:27 -- ...striving together for the faith of the gospel...
- so what we read in verse 1 of chapter 2 is just shorthand for the gospel...or blessings and benefits of the believing in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ...

- and again, surely Paul didn't question whether those things were part of the package of having a personal relationship with Christ...
- then why did He use this construction "if there is"?...it's because sometimes we keep ideas like this safely tucked away in their Tupperware container, and then we wonder why we don't have the direction or the power to be the kind of friend described in the rest of the text...
- so perhaps it would be best to read this as...if there is any encouragement in Christ...in your way of thinking...
 - if you have learned to celebrate ideas like that everyday...not because they're not true – but because you may not have learned how to make ideas like that a meaningful part of the grid through which you view your life everyday...
- so, celebrate the position you enjoy in Christ....well, how does Paul describe it?...

A. What it is – v. 1.

1. You have been, and continue to be, encouraged in Christ.
 - Encouragement – paraklesis
 - coming alongside someone in their time of need and providing whatever assistance is necessary
 - another form of that word is the name for the Holy Spirit of God...our Comforter, the One who comes alongside us...
 - and when you think about the challenge it is to be a good friend...to work on humility...to try to put their interest before your own...
 - that can be so hard because of the power of the sin of selfishness beating inside our breasts...
 - but Paul says – think about that through the lens of the gospel...
 - you're not doing this by yourself...Paul will later say in this book...
 - Philippians 4:13 - I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.
2. You have been consoled by His love.
 - paramuthion – speaking closely with someone, giving comfort and solace
 - do you remember the day you came to Christ as Savior and Lord?...
 - and I realize everybody has a different story to tell...
 - but for many here – you were in the middle of a terrible storm in your life...or laden down with sin and guilt...and when you repented of your sin and placed your faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ...
 - it was like Jesus stilled the storm...do you still remember that?...
 - why should you conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel in the way you treat your friends?...because you still haven't gotten over the fact that Christ consoled you...with His love...
 - 1 John 3:1 - See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and *such* we are.
3. You have fellowship with the Spirit.
 - koinonia – partnership and mutual sharing
 - really, people like you and me...having the Holy Spirit resident inside of us...having access to His power and His guidance and His fruit...
 - if that's true we shouldn't expect less of our friendship abilities...we should expect more...
4. You have been treated with affection and compassion.
 - some of us were in big trouble when Jesus rescued us...
 - and how did Christ treat us?...
 - just like the OT prophets said He would...

- Isaiah 42:3 - A bruised reed He will not break and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish...

- now here's the question...how should truths like that impact the way we relate to our friends?
- and Paul answers that in the very next verse...

B. Where it leads – v. 2.

1. Be of the same mind.
2. Maintain the same love.
3. Be united in the Spirit.
4. Be intent on one purpose.

- and what are the key words there?...same, united, one...

- the idea is – the reason that some people have trouble making and keeping friendships is because they are so quick to find fault...and quickly judge...and divide up...they can't be of the same mind with anyone, they won't maintain love...

- what's lacking in that tendency?...an appreciation of the gospel...

- what if Christ had treated us the way we sometimes treat others?

- and we're not talking about doctrinal issues here – sometimes you do have to divide on the basis of issues clearly taught in the Word...

- but that's not what we're talking about...

- Ephesians 4:3 - being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

- now, let's just pause right there and ask a question...

- is the way you treat other people consistent with the way God has chosen to treat you?...

- do you view them through the lens of the gospel?...

- when you find yourself becoming impatient...do you say, wait, but God has chosen to be patient with me...

- or you're tempted to cut that person off quickly...but you say – wait, that's not the way God treated me...

- therefore, I want to maintain the same mind, I want to maintain the same love, I want to be united in Spirit and purpose...

- now, what does that start looking like in practical ways...that's the beauty of this text...it gets more practical the further you move into the verses...the principle is...

II. Develop a Mindset of Humility Toward Your Friends.

A. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit.

- did I read that correctly?...

- is there anyone here who would say...I meet that principle perfectly with every person in my life?...

- could you say that you always function in that way in your marriage?...

- with your children?...

- with your co-workers and friends?...

- and I realize that you and I might say – but that's really hard...to do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit?...

- and our response to that would be what?...the gospel of Jesus Christ frees us up to do hard things...It directs us, it empowers us, it sustains us...

- that's why Paul had previously said... Philippians 1:21 - For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

- so what helps us overcome selfishness?...biblical friendships are not about what I want...biblical friendships are about what Christ wants...

B. Humbly regard others as being more important than yourself.

- how many fights get started because someone is not getting their way...

- you have to say it the way I want it to be said...

- you have to do it the way I want it to be done...

- it's my way or the highway...
- and you and I will have opportunities to do that even today...and on through the week..."honey, let's do it your way this time...what's your preference..."

C. Choose to focus on the needs of your friend.

- Philippians 2:4 - do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.
- that's what the gospel calls us to do, and that's what the gospel enables us to do...
- someone passed along a great illustration of that to in a recent Mops magazine...I don't always find time to read this publication :), so I appreciate it when folks help me in this way...
- interesting that the author even used phrases like "living life together" and finding the meaning of a "true friend".
- that's what the gospel looks like with clothes on....or in this case I suppose, what it looks like with a hospital gown on...
- do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others...
- now, what this passage looks like for most of us today is not donating one of our organs to save a friend's life...
- but what does it look like for you?...
- here's just some random questions:
 1. what about all the tasks that have to be done around the house just to keep things going?...
 - regardless of your age...regardless of what role you have in the family...how does this passage flesh itself out?...
 - recently I heard about a young couple who are not part of this church who were having a war over who was going to do the dishes...
 - so they just let them stack up day after day after day, one person waiting for the other to finally say uncle...
 - and I thought – how sad – what a crazy thing to fight about...
 - and then I thought – please tell me that no one who would attend this church would ever behave in that sort of childish, self-centered in their home...
 - where's the gospel in that?....
 - Christ died to free us from that kind of pettiness...
 - and if you would say – well, I'm too good to do the dishes...or I'm too important to carry out the trash...or I'll clean my room when I decide it needs to be cleaned...
 - do you hear the pride in all of that?...with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourself...
 2. What about in the conversations that you have with other people?...
 - when you put down the phone, or walk away from the table...did you spend more time talking, or more time listening?...
 - was that conversation more about you, or more about others?...
 - don't merely look out for your own interests...

3. What about when you are having a disagreement with someone else, an argument?...

- what is going through your mind during that event?...
- how can I best understand what this person is saying?...
- how can I compromise and use this as an opportunity to show love?...
- How can I represent their position most fairly in the days ahead?...
- that's why some people never get anything solved...
 - stubbornness, selfishness, and pride are anti-gospel...
 - and when you put two people like that in the same room...nothing will ever be solved...

- and I realize someone might say – and that's exactly why I cut that person off...
- that's why I stopped talking to them...
- that's why I'm mad at them...
- I've decided to fool proof my life...have you ever heard that one?...I'm going to fool proof my life...
 - Really? I didn't think we believed in suicide ☺...
 - what would happen if Jesus decided to fool-proof His life?...
 - people like you and me would be in real trouble...

III. Rejoice in the Opportunities this Process Gives You to Become More Like Your Savior.

A. All of this starts in the way you choose to think.

Philippians 2:5 - Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

- if all we walk out of here with today is a determination to make a few behavior modifications...any change that happens at all will be short lived...
- this requires a change in the way we think about ourselves...and our Lord...and the people the Lord has placed around us...
- [could even consider taking a test – on a scale of 1-10, how does the way I typically think about my friends compare to the mind of Christ...
 - those words revealed that I was thinking like Christ...
 - those actions revealed that I was thinking like Christ...]

B. Being like Christ means emptying ourselves.

- theologians refer to this text as the kenosis passage...that terminology comes from verse 7...
- Philippians 2:7 - but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men.
- the word empty is the Greek word “kenow”....
- we're not saying that Jesus was in any sense less than God while he was here on earth...that would be a terrible heresy...
- He was the God-man – but He voluntarily gave up the independent uses of some of his divine attributes while here on earth to completely fulfill the Father's plan...
- that's what great friendships consist of – people who willing to empty themselves...

C. The focus of this kind of life is the cross of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:8 - And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.