

Series: John
Title: You are My Friends
Text: John 15: 12-15
Date: July 14, 2022
Place: SGBC, NJ

The Lord Jesus had been the target of the Pharisee's enmity. He knew when he departed his disciples would be. He knew offenses would arise between true brethren. Unbelief would arise. They would sin and be puffed up. We see it in the early church right away. The same troubles have been in the church from the beginning. The Lord declares why he is teaching his saints these things.

John 16: 1: These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended.

God's saints are sinners who Christ has saved, is saving and shall yet save because of his everlasting love for his people. So Christ teaches us to love as he loved us. Knowing these things, on the night he was betrayed, our Lord said to his apostles,

John 15: 9: As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love....12: This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. 13: Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. 14: Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. 15: Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. 16: Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. 17: These things I command you, that ye love one another.

Subject: Friends

Proposition: One way the Lord grows us to love one another is by making us see more clearly that there is nothing in us, personally, that made Christ love us and much for which not to love us; yet he loved us and continues to love us. He does so because God's elect are his friends.

LOVE TAUGHT BY EXPERIENCE

Our Lord will make each of his people hear and know this personally our own selves. The Lord is not teaching me how my brethren are to love me but how I am to love my brethren. If we hear this applying it to others we miss it. But if we are Christ's he will correct us in love. And it is Christ continuing unchanged in his love to us when we offend and are unlovable that he teaches us to love our brethren when they offend and are unlovable. That is when love is proven to be of God.

At the time our Lord spoke this, the apostles loved Christ and loved one another. But they did not love as the Lord would grow them to love. He grows us the more the Lord makes us experience that his love to us knows no change.

They had each boasted of their love for Christ. Peter said, "I will not deny you Lord. Although all shall be offended, yet will not I. I will lay down my life for you." Knowing this was their heart, as our Lord spoke of loving as Christ has loved us each of the apostles were probably thinking, "That is how I love Christ and love my brethren. I *will* abide in you. I *will* do whatsoever you command me."

So the Lord permitted the devil to sift Peter. Peter denied the Lord, left the Lord alone, went back to his fishing boats and led the others with him. But Christ had mercy on him and restored him in love. Thus Peter learned there was nothing in him for the Lord to love. Yet, the Lord loved him and restored him freely without a cause in Peter. So Peter was taught a little more to love his brethren as Christ loved him.

Deuteronomy 7: 7: The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye *were* the fewest of all people: 8: But BECAUSE THE LORD LOVED YOU...

By denying the Lord, Peter experienced that he did not choose Christ. But the Lord chose him and ordained him. Therefore, because his salvation was by free, predestinating grace, the Lord continued to love him and restored him. Thus Peter was taught a little more what it is to love his brethren as Christ loved him, without end.

Jeremiah 31: 3: The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, *saying*, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.

Peter experienced that it was not Peter laying down his life for Christ that justified him from his sins. Even after Peter denied him, Christ laid down his life for Peter and justified him—as Christ justified all his elect while as yet we were the ungodly. Therefore, the Lord was just to show Peter mercy and restore him—as Christ is just to show mercy to each of his redeemed. So Peter was grown a little more to love his brethren as Christ loved him by showing them mercy and forgiveness because he learned it was just because his brethren are righteous in Christ. It is just to show mercy to our brethren because they are justified, righteous in Christ.

Peter experienced that it was not Peter producing fruit but that Christ is the Vine and we the branches. The Lord ordained Peter to go forth and bring forth fruit, as Christ has done all his people. Therefore, Peter's faith failed not because Christ interceded for him. So Peter learned a little more that to love his brethren as Christ loved him by praying for them and trusting them to Christ.

By his fall and restoration, Peter was taught personally what God was teaching through Hosea and Gomer. Peter learned Christ is our great Hosea. Peter learned he was Gomer, the sinner. And here is what the Lord was teaching.

Hosea 3:1: Then said the LORD unto [Hosea], Go yet, love a woman beloved of *her* friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine.

Christ commanded his apostles these things, so that as the Lord made them to experience their own sins, the Spirit brought these things to remembrance. So they understood a little more that it was nothing in them that made Christ love them. Yet, Christ loved them and continued to love them. This is how Christ teaches us to love one another as Christ loved us—by Christ loving us when we see there is nothing in us to love.

Peter knew all the apostles knew about his denial and so did the churches. Therefore, each time Peter preached or wrote about loving brethren as Christ loved us, how it must have humbled him in his heart. But we only speak the word in love, with compassion for fallen brethren, when every word of scripture makes us see ourselves as the sinner. Yet, beholding our sins, we behold Christ, that Friend that sticks closer than a brother, who continues to love us when there is nothing in us to love. So Peter strengthened his brethren by teaching them what Christ taught him:

1 Peter 3: 8: Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous; 9: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

1 Peter 5: 5...Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. 6: Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: 7: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. 8: Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: 9: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. 10: But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle *you*. 11 To him *be* glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

We really can do nothing without Christ. But we can become proud even in our suffering, thinking no one is suffering as we are, personally suffering. It is experiencing Christ love, after we suffer for a little while in the trial, yet Christ restores us. Then, having experienced the power of the God of all grace to strengthen us and grow us in love, we know that Christ is accomplishing the same afflictions in our brethren as he is in

us personally. This is what makes us love by going to Christ and praying for one another and using the gospel of his grace to help lift the hands of our brethren that hang down and strengthen their feeble knees that they may make straight paths for their feet to Christ.

Think of the apostle Paul. How the Lord's love to him must have humbled Paul each time he preached on "*loving brethren as Christ loved us*" when he knew how he and brother Barnabas parted ways. He knew his brethren knew and many used it against him. But having experienced Christ love to him, he taught his brethren what Christ taught him:

Colossians 3: 12: Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; 13: Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also *do* ye. 14: And above all these things *put on* charity, which is the bond of perfectness. 15: And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful

Paul had rebuked Peter when Peter switched from the Gentiles table to the Jews. Then Paul did the same thing when he offered the vow at Jerusalem. Yet Christ loved him by stopping him and putting him chains and continuing to use him to preach the gospel. Imagine if you heard one of the preachers was in prison. Paul said,

2 Timothy 1: 15: This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me

2 Timothy 2: 9: Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, *even* unto bonds;...

2 Timothy 4:17: Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me...

And the Lord used brother Onesiphorus to seek out Paul and refresh him. Paul said, "*He was not ashamed of my chain*" (2 Tim 1: 16).

Christ used Paul to write most of the new testament from prison. If Christ uses us to preach the Man of sorrows acquainted with grief, he will make us men of sorrows acquainted with grief to make us know that Christ is that friend that sticks closer than a brother—that brother born for adversity. It is his unchanging love for us that teaches us that the answer to every problem is to preach Christ and his everlasting love for his people. So when Paul heard the church at Ephesus was beginning to leave their first love, he loved them as Christ loved him and wrote,

Ephesians 4: 1: I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, 2: With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; 3: Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Ephesians 5: 2: And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

That is what humbles and breaks the heart and makes us love as Christ loved us. When we read the word and see that we, our own self, is the sinner. Yet, the Spirit renews you in the spirit to know that the Friend that sticks closer than a brother continues to love you and restore you. That is the only way we really learn to love as Christ loved us and speak the word in love. We only speak the word in love when every word of scripture makes us see ourselves as the sinner and Christ as that Friend that sticks closer than a brother, who continues to love us when there is nothing in us to love.

CHRIST'S LOVE FOR HIS FRIENDS

John 15: 12: This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. 13: Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Proverbs 17:17: A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Proverbs 18:24...and there is a friend *that* sticketh closer than a brother.

Christ is that friend; that brother born for the adversity of his people, to deliver us from our sins. He was speaking of his love for his people when he said, “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*”

The Lord Jesus is God, equal with the Father. He knew no sin. The law had no claims on him. Yet, he laid down his rights and willingly gave himself to bear our sin and curse unto the death of the cross. He is not a friend that loved us because he could get gain from us. We could give him nothing.

2 Corinthians 8:9: For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

1 John 3: 16: Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

By laying down his life for his friends, Christ made each of his elect the righteousness of God in him! He loaded us with unsearchable riches.

IN LOVE CHRIST TEACHES HIS FRIENDS THE GOSPEL

John 15: 15: Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

A lord does not tell his servants what he is doing. But Christ teaches his people the gospel. He makes us know all things he has heard of the Father. Therefore, he calls us friends. He does so even when we fall. We see this that night. As the apostles were troubled and in unbelief, Christ continued to teach them the gospel.

God the Father loved his people in Christ and elected us to salvation. So we came into this world joint-heirs with Christ. But while dead in sins, as servants, we knew not what our Lord did (Gal 4). As servants, we knew not what our Lord did. We were trying to keep the commandments of God, in servitude and bondage. Yet, what a Preeminent Friend! Christ made us know him and the good news of his accomplished redemption by the Spirit.

1 John 5:20: And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, *even* in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

What a privilege of grace! Christ has made himself known unto us because we are his friends. But he has not done this for all. He prayed to the Father saying, “Father I thank thee that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes” (Mt 11: 25).

Therefore, when his child falls into sin and unbelief, Christ continues to teach us the gospel to keep us believing him and resting in him. He truly is that Friend that sticks closer than a brother. He says to his child personally, “You are my friend. Now, you, believe me. You, trust me to save you and trust me to save your brethren. Now, lay down your life, for my friends, as I have laid down my life for you, my friend. Speak the gospel to them as I have to you.”

IMMUTABLE LOVE AND GRACE

John 15: 16: Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

Since God our Father and his Son loved his people without a cause in us and chose us and predestinated us by his grace, we can be sure that his love and grace never changes toward his people.

He had been the target of the Pharisee’s enmity. Our all-knowing Redeemer knew when he departed his disciples would be the target of the world. In the next passage he speaks of the hatred of this world. He knew offenses would arise between true brethren. He knew unbelief and doubting would arise in his

people. He knew we would sin and be puffed up. He knew some would prefer one preacher over the other. We see it in the early church right away. All the things the apostles wrote in the epistles is because believers were doing things they ought not or not doing things as they ought. The same troubles have been in the church from the beginning. God's saints are sinners who have been saved, are being saved and shall yet be saved by the love of our Redeemer.

But Christ is not a fair-weather friend. He is the Friend that sticks closer than a brother no matter what because God the Father chose us by grace and his grace never changes toward his people—"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and ordained you..." He chose us, not we him. He ordained us. Therefore, he shall bring his purpose to pass. He rules all things to bring his purpose to pass. He rides upon the trial to produce fruit in us by the experience of his unchanging love by his Spirit. Also, Christ shall produce converts—fruits, first fruits—through the gospel he uses us to preach. And Christ's fruit shall remain by Christ himself interceding and keeping those he ordained.

Christ is the Vine and we the branches. Without him we can do nothing. But by him ordaining us to bring forth fruit, Christ makes us fruitful. Christ makes our fruit remain. Even when Peter denied the Lord and it appeared Peter's faith failed, it did not. Peter's faith failed not only because Christ interceded for him. Therefore, the fruit the Lord produced in Peter remained. Peter was the Lord's first fruit, created by Christ. And the fruit the Lord produced in Peter continued by Christ alone.

LOVE AT HIS THRONE OF GRACE

Our great High Priest sits upon a throne of grace. Therefore, he loves us no less when we are in need and run to his throne of grace for help. When dark clouds arise, our faithful Sun of Righteousness shines brighter before our eyes in his unchanging love to us. He promises "*that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.*"

In every need has not Christ always helped you, child of God? When you have been in doubt what to do, did you ever go wrong when you left it to him? Our sin does not surprise him. He entered covenant to save us before the world was made. So he knew we would fall. He is teaching his apostles here because he knew they would need more grace. Our sin does not surprise him. He corrects us because he loves us. And by his chastening hand, he always draws us in lovingkindness to his throne of grace. It is because our Lord delights to show mercy.

When a parent came to him broken hearted and weeping because their child was sick nigh unto death, he did not rail on the parent. He did not say, "You haven't been a faithful parent." He had mercy and healed their child. By that, he showed how he loves his people. Often he either gave faith or increased faith in what he did for them. It is his unchanging love and mercy and grace to us when we utterly fall, that makes us grow in love to him and to one another when they fall.

When the Pharisee's brought the woman caught in adultery, the Lord Jesus stood between her and her accusers. He said to them, "Whoever among you is without sin let him cast the first stone." After they all left, he said to her, "Woman where are thine accusers? Does no man condemn thee? Neither do I, go and sin no more." In the past some refused to preach that passage because they said he did not discipline that woman and it would cause believers to sin more. But it is his love in standing between us and the accuser, it is his love in laying down his life for us so that he is just to forgive us all our sins, it is his forgiveness of our sins that is the true discipline that makes us fear him and part from our sins. He shows us this love over and over and over because, though we desire not to, yet we sin over and over.

Psalms 130: 3: If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? 4 But *there is* forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.

That blind beggar was before them. Here is what we are prone to do. The apostles aid, "*Lord, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?*" That was one Christ loved. He was blind. He was begging. He was in need! Yet, to the apostles he was the object of a theological debate. They behold a poor sinner in need and speculated about whether it was his sin or his parents that made him be born blind.

Here is how Christ loved you that are his. "*Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him*" (Jn 9: 1-3). That was a sinner Christ

everlastingly loved. He had pity on him. His heart went out to the blind beggar in compassion because Christ loved him. So he healed that man. And not only did give him sight but he showed his disciples how he loves his people freely and saves us by his works, apart from our help. That is what he is showing us in every trial that he sends. He is showing us his mighty works to save. And he does it in unchanging love for his people.

He calls us friends. If you have met someone of renown a few times, you might say they are your friend. But they might not know you. But God our Savior says we are his friends. That is something!

A friend is someone you can go to and tell things you can tell no one else—without fear—knowing they love you and will help in time of need.

Do you find yourself going to Christ multiple times in a day, repentant, asking mercy and finding mercy and forgiveness every time? We find ourselves doing so the more he grows us to see that in our flesh dwells no good thing. But it is his continual mercy and forgiveness, even multiple times in a day, that makes us love our brethren as Christ loves us when they offend us multiple times in a day.

When your heart was heavy and no one could understand, have you not always been able to go to him and found he is able to comfort you as no other? We never find his arm shortened or his ear heavy. Our Lord is born for adversity so he sympathizes with his people in all our adversity.

Christ is the only Friend that remains the same in unity with his friends through all adversity. He never will change in his love to his people.

If you have never come to Christ, go to him and cast all your care on him. Believe on him today. And if you believe on him, does not his unchanging love make you want to love your brethren as he loves you? He says, "*This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you...These things I command you,*"—so that when you are offended, you remember how I loved you and—"ye love one another."

Amen!