

# A True Friend

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**Bible Text:** John 15:13-16  
**Preached on:** Sunday, September 9, 2018

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Grab your Bibles this morning and let's go to the Gospel of John, John 15. The Gospel of John, chapter 15. While you're turning there, let me share with you what a little London schoolboy wrote in his prize-winning essay, a pretty profound statement that speaks to the times more than the first time I read it. He said in his award-winning essay, "I think I know why so many twins are born into this world, because little children are afraid to come into this world alone." It is a scary place out there, is it not? It's a difficult place. It's a challenging place. I mean, we live in a culture that doesn't even know what male and female is anymore. The hate, the division, the strife, the murder, the war. We need a true friend

Proverbs, the writer of Proverbs reminds us in Proverbs 18:24, "A man of many friends comes to ruin, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." Now a person who looks to a lot of things is going to fall in trouble and I think this includes we are very prone to look to this person's idea or this philosophy or this teaching or maybe that religion, but those all lead to ruin but there is someone, not just some thing, but some one who will be a true friend and will stick with you closer than a brother. I thought about the song, it's not that old of a song,

"I would love to tell you what I think of Jesus  
Since I found in Him a friend so strong and true;  
I would tell you how He chang'd my life completely  
He did something that no other friend could do.

No one ever cared for me like Jesus,  
There's no other friend so kind as He;  
No one else could take the sin and darkness from me  
O how much He cared for me!"

Now let's look at our text. John 15 and we'll beginning in verse 13. Jesus speaking to his disciples says this,

13 "Greater love has no one than this, that one 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 slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is

doing; but I have called you friends, for all things 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 would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you."

Jesus is a true friend. Let me give you three thoughts on that this morning and they may startle you a little bit, especially the first one. He's a true friend, number 1, because he wounds his friends. Jesus wounds his friends. Now look at verse 14 of our text, as he's talking to these guys, he said, "You are My friends if you do what I command you." Now immediately that's sort of wounding. That's a little offensive. How many people come up to you and say, "Now you'll be my friend if you'll do all these things"? You'd say, "Wait a minute, is that what a friendship is?" Jesus said, "You're my friend if you do what I command you."

Jesus was prone to make strong, often startling statements. One of my pet peeves after 38 years of expositional preaching is that the world wants to impose on Jesus their idea of Jesus and you get this weak, Caspar Milquetoast, effeminate kind of figure. Jesus was a man's man. He said some strong and difficult things from time to time. He would tell his followers, "If you are indeed going to be my follower, you must take up your cross and follow me, take up the electric chair, take up the execution chamber and follow me." That's a difficult thing to hear. You are sort of wounded when you hear that. "It's not going to be easier than that?" But someone who loves us and is faithful to us tells us the truth even if it's difficult.

Boy, one of those reference points in my life was with a football coach in high school. We were actually having a party and I forgot, maybe it was the homeroom guy, I don't know what it was, and there was some cake and we were eating cake. It's kind of a loose time. He was sort of sitting on the desk and I was standing around. I had a lot of respect for this man. He had a good impact on my life and I'm thankful for it. And a little piece of cake, maybe a third the size of a dime fell off of my plate and went onto the carpet. Without even thinking, I just kind of put my foot on it. The coach looked at me and said, "Noblit, that's about the way you do things." Whoa. Now I don't think he really meant that I was a man of low character, but what he was saying was, "I believe in you. I love you and I don't want you to act that way the rest of your life. The little things matter." It was wounding in front of all of my classmates to see this esteemed coach that I respected look at me and call me out in front of all of them over a little piece of crumb, but do you know to this day when I do something, I try to finish it in an excellent way because I can hear Coach Adams saying, "Noblit, that's just about like you." Our friends wound us if they love us and they help us and Jesus is the premier example of that.

Now when you think about Jesus wounding us because he loves us, probably as far as a human perspective, now once you're converted and begin to understand, you see the rich goodness in this but as far as the first time you hear it from a human perspective, I think the most wounding and difficult statement Jesus ever told anyone was, "Repent." Repent because repentance is the idea that you're all wrong. You are wrong in your core being.

You need to change. You need a totally new direction. You need to turn around from the way you're thinking and the way you're heading and you need to turn and change.

Oh, he got into a lot of trouble calling on people to repent. As a matter of fact, it was the pattern of his ministry. The Gospels tell us that when he began his ministry, his pattern was to preach repentance, "You must turn around. You are going wrong. You are thinking wrong." By the way, it always starts with wrong thinking. Most of us get real hung up on all the do's and the don'ts, "Well, I did this. That wasn't right. I didn't do that and I should have done it." That's true. That's sin but the foundation of sin is the wrong heart. The heart is damaged. The heart is selfish. The heart has wrong philosophies or ideas about what life is and Jesus went everywhere telling everyone, "You've got to repent. Change your direction. Abhor your sin. Go in a new direction."

He told the religious crowd of his day that he wanted them to repent. In Matthew 23, Jesus is confronting what was called the scribes and the Pharisees. They were the religious leaders or the religious elite of the day and Jesus began to tell these guys, as a matter of fact, they had some funny names for some of these leaders because they tried so hard to dot all the I's and cross all the T's and live righteous or good in the sight of men because that's what was really important to them was it was for show, and they even called one group of these Pharisees the black and blue Pharisees. They called them the black and blue Pharisees because they would literally cover their eyes lest they look on something and be greedy towards it or envious or have a lustful thought in their minds, so they would cover their heads and they would run into stuff literally, and they called them the black and blue. That's how hard they tried but listen to some of the words Jesus said to these fellows. These are straight out of the Bible. He said, "You are hypocrites." He said, "You're blind guides." He said, "You are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You are like whitewashed tombs." Now that may not be so bad to you and I but to a Jew a dead body made you ceremonially and spiritually condemned and unclean before God, so that's like Jesus said, "You are the rottenest of the rotten. You are a whitewashed tomb." He said, "You are serpents." He said, "You are a bunch of brood of vipers." That's tough stuff. That's a manly rebuke, to say the least, and I can guarantee you these men were wounded. We know they got angry because after a few months of Jesus doing this, they banded together and said, "Guess what we're going to have to do? We're going to have to kill this guy." I mean, it stung deep. It was wounding.

Well, he told the most diligent religious crowd of his day, "You guys have got to repent. You're wrong. You're going in the wrong direction. Your thinking is wrong and your direction is wrong," but on the other hand, he taught a notoriously open immoral person that they needed to repent. Remember the woman at the well? We see her story in John 4. Jesus goes through Samaria and, by the way, Jews didn't go through Samaria. They were half-breeds. They were considered radically unclean. You didn't go around Samaritans. And not only does he go to Samaria, he goes to a well and a woman shows up at noontime, the text points that out because she couldn't come earlier or later when the other ladies came because she was a lady of the night. She wasn't allowed around the other ladies of the community so she had to come during the middle of the day, the hot time, and get her water, and Jesus speaks to the woman. What an amazing thing. Jews

didn't speak to women in public and a Jewish man didn't dare speak to a Samaritan woman in public, and much less a woman known for her open immoral lifestyle.

So Jesus welcomes her, he loves her, he shows compassion to her, he has consideration for her and then look what he says, it'll be on your screen, John 14:17-18, and Jesus had told her, "Where is your husband?" And she responds, "The woman answered and said, I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have well said that I have no husband for you have had five husbands and the one whom you now have is not your husband. This you've said truly." On the one hand compassion, kindness, he receives her, but on the other hand he's saying, "You need to repent. What you're doing in your life is wrong." Be done with listening to the worldlings tell us what our Jesus says and what he does. He's a man's man. He would say things to people that would even be wounding but he was wounding them because he loved them.

You see, Jesus has all wisdom. He knows what's best for us. For example, in John 2:25, the Bible reminds us, "He did not need anyone to bear witness concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man." He says, "I know you from the core of your being. I know your heart of hearts. As a matter of fact, I know you better than you know you so I tell you to repent. You've got to recognize what you're believing in is wrong. Your view of life is wrong. What you're trusting is wrong. Change from that. Go in a different direction." That's hard to hear. That's really hard to hear.

Do you know what churches are doing today? Churches today are trying to tone down this aspect so they can win more people. Brothers and sisters, if you are not won with repentance, you are not won. That's why Southern Baptist have up to eight or nine million church members who don't even go to church because some preacher told them you're okay if you repeated a prayer. Wait a minute, it's okay to repeat a prayer but did you repent? Did anything happen in your heart? Was there any change? I'm not talking about perfection here, I'm talking about a new direction in life. No longer are you looking to religion or a sinner's prayer or baptism or going to church or some sort of ritual or good works you might do. No, that's wrong thinking. You need to change from that. "Now I put all my hope in Jesus Christ." That turning is repentance and Jesus was a preacher of repentance.

I remember reading the story of a missionary and he was in a remote tribal region and he set up a surgical office. He was a medical missionary but he was doing surgery and helping these dear people so he might share the Gospel with them. The tribal chief's son had a ruptured appendix and they didn't know what was, they were a primitive people, and he didn't really trust this white skinned, so-called doctor that had come in from somewhere else, but as his son got worse and worse, he realized his son was close to death so he rushed over to the surgeon and that medical missionary surgeon said, "Sir, I've got to operate on your son." He said, "What do you mean operate on my son?" "I've got to cut him open and remove this diseased organ or he's going to die." And the chief said, "No! No! He's hurting enough already!" He didn't understand surgery. He didn't understand taking out diseased tissue. He thought you're going to inflict more wounds. But finally he succumbed to desperation, the operation was successful and the boy lived.

Well, that's the way mankind is when they hear the strong clear words of Jesus because they wound. They wound. It looks like this is more painful, this is more hurtful. No, this is the road to healing. Jesus wounds his friends because he loves you and wants you healed and repentance seems wounding but it's the road home.

Jesus knows we're sinners in the heart. The Bible tells us we are conceived and we are a sinful being from the moment we were a one-celled human being in the wombs of our mothers. The Bible tells us that we come forth from the womb speaking lies even. There is a corruption to mankind. There is a fallenness that's in all of us, the Bible says. Why do you think it took the death of the Son of God to fix it? Because it's so deep and it's so wrong and it's so bad and it's in all of us. We are conceived in sin. As soon we get old enough to understand what's right and wrong, we all practice sin, every single one of us, starting with me.

Not only that, we'll be held accountable before a holy God for spreading sin. The Bible warns us not to be a stumbling block. Do you know what that means? Anything at any time whereby you cause someone else in any way to dishonor God, especially coming to Jesus Christ, you are a stumbling block. Can you just imagine from the moment of conception to the time I begin to make choices all the way through my life influencing others, I have heaped up a mountain of condemnation as a sinner. No wonder Jesus in love says to his friends, "This is hard but you've got to repent, realize you are bad and wrong and you need to trust someone else and go in a different direction."

Jesus is a true friend because he wounds his friends. He tells them the truth. Number 2, II: not only that, he wins his friends. He didn't come to you with a club in coercion. He didn't just threaten you with eternal judgment and leave it at that. He doesn't just come to you with a hard fist and demand subservience and obedience. No, he wins his friends. Look at verse 13, if you will. As he's talking to these men in this text he says, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." He has begun to teach these men about his death on the cross for them and he's trying to say to them, "If you'll begin to grasp the love I have for you, if you'll begin to grasp the incomparable sacrifice and love I'm going to give toward you when I die on the cross, then you'll love me back." In other words, he wins our love. He wins our faith. He wins our devotion.

Now just stop for a moment. I know you're busy, I know there's a lot going on but let's stop for a moment. Can you imagine Jesus, he is God in human form, he walked this earth, and the Bible says you could characterize how he was treated by this phrase: he was one who was despised and rejected of men. What he went through for us: falsely accused; slanderously criticized. You see our politicians today, by the way, there's a lot to criticize from the President on down. I like his policies and positions but he's a nut. Well, I shouldn't say that. Please forgive me. I wish he would keep his positions and not handle himself in a way that riles everybody up against him so much, but it wouldn't matter anyway, I don't think, because both sides are just in this sport of spinning and twisting everything to maliciously put the other party in the worst possible light. It's just the way things are. Well, that's what Jesus experienced. You can't fathom to what degree that the leaders of the day, Jew and Gentile and the people of the communities to a great degree,

would spin things to put Jesus in the worst possible light. He didn't have to do that. He could have stayed in heaven on the throne of the universe but he didn't. Do you know why? He was winning our love. He came to us and sought us, sometimes theologians call it the romance of redemption, and he romanced us and he wooed us and he has won us as we consider what love he has. He goes to a cross. They nail him to a cross and judgment is poured out on him in our place and Jesus suffers and bleeds and dies, no wonder he says to his disciples, "You're not going to see any greater love," and really he's pointing to himself, "than when a man lays down his life for his friends and," he says, "that's what I'm going to do." He wins us by his love.

The Bible says when he went to the cross, he became our substitute. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, the Bible says, "He," that's God the Father, "made Him," God the Son, Jesus, "who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." He became sin and when Jesus hung on the cross, the Bible says he became sin. It doesn't mean he committed sin because he didn't, but as Jesus hung on the cross in our place, God the Father looked upon Jesus as if he were the sinner you are and as if he had committed the sins we commit. God says, "I'm going to view him as if he's you and I'm pouring it all out on him, all the judgment, all the wrath we all deserve." Contemplate that and does he not win your faith? Not coercion. Not browbeating. Not an iron fist. He wins us through the love he has for us.

1 Peter 2:24 reminds us, "He Himself," here's the phrase that penetrates, "He bore our sins in His body on the cross," he bore them on himself. That's why we preach salvation is full and free. That's why we preach that salvation is a free gift of God. Why? Because Jesus bore them all. He didn't bear many of them or most of them, he bore all of them. Let that sink in. He wins your love. He wins your devotion. He wins your faithfulness. He's a true friend. He didn't coerce you, he wins you. There is so much more I could say.

Let me go to III, not only does he wound his friends because in love he knows we've got to repent and change and turn to Christ to be saved; not only does he win his friends but, thirdly, he waits for his friends. He waits for his friends. Have you ever had somebody who wouldn't wait on you? Well, you think, "Well, why wouldn't they give me a little more time? Why wouldn't they wait?" Jesus waits for his children.

Now I pulled this out of verse 16, if you will, look at verse 16. The last part of verse 16 he says, "so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you." In other words, "I'm going to be somewhere very much alive after I die on the cross for your sins and I'm going to be waiting for you there and seeing to it that everything you need, if you are one of those who are truly my disciple, if you're one of those who has truly turned from trusting religion, baptism, whatever it is, and put your full trust in Christ, if you're one of those, then whatever you ask, I'm going to be there with the Father and we're going to see that you get it. I'm waiting for you in heaven and I'll be there for you." As a matter of fact, let me give you John 17:24. What an encouraging verse this is. Jesus says, "Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am in order that they may behold my glory." Now here's Jesus praying to God the Father and here's Jesus' prayer to God the Father, "I want all those that are mine to be with me in

heaven." That's powerful. God the Father always answered the prayers of God the Son, Jesus Christ.

So he says all of us are going to be there with him. He's waiting now. One day we're all going to be there with him and as I said just a moment ago, three quick points under this, what he's doing while he's waiting because he's not just waiting. He's active while he waits. There is a sense in which he has sat down on the Father's throne in heaven because he has finished the work of redemption, but also he's busy on our behalf while he is there.

What is he doing while he's waiting? 1. He's petitioning for us. Hebrews 7:25 reminds us, "He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him since He always lives to make intercession for them." He is in heaven waiting for us and there he is interceding for us. I don't know how that works or how that looks but I can almost picture Jesus up there with the nails scars in his hands and the nails scars in his feet, and when Satan the accuser of the brethren comes and says, "Aha, did you see Jeff Noblit? He sinned. He is worthy of judgment." And Jesus says, "Father," and the Father says, "I'm satisfied in the death of my Son for Jeff Noblit." And the Bible says he's just in heaven to ever intercede for us. In other words, he can't fail. In Revelation when he returns, he so faithful he's got a banner, his name is Faithful and True. That's who he is. That's what he's like. Now we have friends down here that are pretty faithful but none of them are really fully faithful but Jesus is.

He is petitioning for us while he waits for us in heaven. He's providing for us while he waits for us in heaven. He said, "If you'll seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these things shall be added unto you. All the things you need in life. Now maybe not everything you want but I'm going to make sure you have provision of everything you need as you work and live as my disciple on the earth." You say, "Pastor, wait a minute, I've wanted some things and I've looked to God for some things and he didn't bring it." That's because he knew in his wisdom you didn't need it. He's faithful to provide what we need.

My goodness, I remember as a young pastor when I first went off to graduate school, I was here part-time, that time just in youth ministry and I was associate pastor and youth director, and I went off to college and I thought, "How in the world is this going to work? I need an apartment in Memphis, I need an apartment here." I wasn't making a lot of money at the time and I remember just getting on my knees and saying, "God, I think this is your will. You want me to train for the ministry. I need the graduate level studies. I don't know how this is going to work out financially." And it was within just a few days after I told that to God, a couple in this church, one of them was in the den, one was on the back porch, they got up and met each other at the back door and when they met at the back door, the man said to the wife, the wife said to the man, "I think the Lord has told me something we ought to do for Brother Jeff." And he said or she said, I don't know who said it first, you know it's he said, she said, but anyway he or she said, "I think we're to give him X amount of money every month," and she said, "I think that's what God told me too." And for those, I crammed three years into four I think in graduate school, and for those years they gave me a check every month that was just what I needed to pay my

rent in Memphis. It might as well have been a million dollars a month to me. It was phenomenal the way God took care, and that's just one of many. God says, "If you'll serve me, I'll be faithful." He's in heaven waiting but he's also providing here for us on earth.

So while he's waiting, he's petitioning for us and he cannot fail. The only way you can lose your salvation is if Jesus fails in heaven. He's our faithful High Priest. You can't lose your redemption unless the Redeemer falls off the throne of heaven and he's not going to fall.

He's petitioning, he's providing, and he's present with us. "Wait a minute, Brother Jeff, you said he's waiting in heaven." Yeah, he's waiting in heaven but he lives in here at the same time. Jesus said in the Gospel of John, I think four times he said, "I'm going to go away but if I go away, I'm going to send you another Comforter. I'm going to send you another Helper," and the Greek *parakletos* means another of the same kind. "I'll be in heaven but I'll be in you. The same kind of me that's in heaven is in you but just in the person of the Holy Spirit. I'll be present with you the whole time you're down here." Well, there are mysteries to that but thank God for the dwelling of the Spirit in the hearts of the saints of God. What a gift and what a blessing that is.

Oh, what a friend Jesus is. What a friend he is. He wounds you but it's because he loves you. He says, "You've got to understand your heart is wrong, your thinking is wrong." Some of you are very religious and you're quite clean and moral people but Jesus may be saying to you this morning, "Do you realize your thinking has been wrong? You're trusting in a religious ritual or a work or church membership. That thinking is wrong. You've got to turn from that and trust in Christ and him alone to save you." That's wounding in a way but you'll never be saved if you don't receive the surgery of Jesus. He wounds to change and make you his forever.

He is faithful to win you. He lays out before you, "Look what I'm doing for you. I'm dying for you. I'm becoming the substitutionary sacrifice in your place. I'm bearing the wrath of God for you."

He's waiting for us but actively waiting for us. Remember the Proverb, Proverbs 18:24? "A man of many friends comes to ruin." You can look to a lot of voices, lots of religious teachers, and even this, lots of Baptist preachers and they may not tell you what you really need to hear. A man of many friends comes to ruin, but he's a friend that sticks closer than a brother.

Charles Weigle was a very gifted musician. He was a Christian man. He was in Christian ministry and Charles Weigle while in his ministry had a very troubled marriage and he was often heartbroken, even depressed over the state of his marriage. He had a little place on the Gulf of Mexico and his testimony is that one night he was particularly discouraged and there was a storm raging coming in on the Gulf and he walked out of his house and he walked down to the beach, he walked to a pier and he walked out on the edge of the pier kind of like where I'm standing now, and he said the waves were rolling and the

wind was howling and he said, "I thought I can jump in here and end the pain. I can just jump in here and the heartache will be over." He said, "But something stopped me and I turned around and I went back up the pier at the beach and into my little cottage. I sat down at my piano," and Charles Weigle said, "in 20 minutes I had written a tune, written some lyrics and composed a tune," and those lyrics are,

"I would love to tell you what I think of Jesus  
Since I found in Him a friend so strong and true;  
I would tell you how He chang'd my life completely  
He did something that no other friend could do.

No one ever cared for me like Jesus,  
There's no other friend so kind as He;  
No one else could take the sin and darkness from me  
O how much He cared for me!"

He cares for you. He cares for you.

"Pastor, I want to know Jesus as my true friend." Now listen and we're done: do you realize you cannot fix or save yourself? I mean, you've settled that, "I know I can't fix me. I can't make myself right before a holy God. I can't do that." Number 2, listen: do you realize you cannot be so bad that Jesus can't save you? You've got to realize that you cannot be so bad the power of Christ can't cleanse you and forgive you. You stop emphasizing your sin and deemphasizing the greatness of our Savior. Where sin abounds, grace did that much more abound. "You don't know where I've been. You don't know what I've done." It doesn't matter. Christ, his love reaches you.

I can't save myself. I realize I can't be so bad that Jesus wouldn't save me. Number 3: I believe he hung on a cross and there became my sin and was punished in my place. Do you believe that? And I do want to change. I want to turn from looking at all the other stuff I've looked to, all the other viewpoints and philosophies and ideas and religious practice, whatever it is, and today wholly and absolutely and exclusively I turn to say today, "I look to Jesus. Christ, an expiring Savior on the cross, you're my only hope. You and you alone. Not you plus baptism. Not you plus church membership. Not you plus a sinner's prayer. Christ. I look to you." The Bible promises if you'll believe in him, you'll not be disappointed, but if you believe in anything else, one of those other many friends, you'll come to ruin.