

Friends of Jesus For the Joy of It

John 15:9-17

November 16, 2014

Dan Hoffman

I wonder why it's such a compliment to tell a woman she looks like a breath of spring, but not to tell her she looks like the end of hard winter. Isn't that the same thing? I wonder why preachers say "In closing..." and then don't. I wonder why a speaker who "needs no introduction" gets one anyway.

Lots of things cause us to wonder. But one of the strangest to me is that God would call us friends.¹ How and why would He do that?

Would you pray with me?

[Pray]

Please open your Bibles to John chapter 15. If you didn't bring your own you will find one in the pew in front of you. As we get started I want to highlight verse 15 which is central to everything Jesus says here.

[Read John 15:15]

Now the section of text we are looking at today takes place the day before Jesus faced His crucifixion, just hours before His arrest.

At this point Judas has already been filled by Satan,² and has gone out to set the betrayal in motion, and Jesus is left knowing that the minutes are ticking and He only has so many words left to speak to the remaining 11 disciples.

And yet, as we will see Jesus isn't rushed. He doesn't have too much to say and too little time to say it. Instead these final words are exactly what He wants to leave His disciples with. They are empowering words of identity and command which lead to a promised reward He desires for them. Identity, Command and a Promised Reward.

In these verses we get the short form for what it means to follow Jesus. So let's go back to verse 9 to see where this starts.

[Read John 15:9]

When it comes to following Jesus it always starts with grace. And here this grace comes in the form of a major identity shift.

¹ Opening adapted from <http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/love-means-what-neil-partington-sermon-on-compassion-88613.asp>

² John 13:30

You could translate this verse to say “Just as much as the Father has loved Me, that is how much I have loved you.”³ Just as much! That’s amazing!

Obviously the love that the Father has for the Son is a know-no-limits, infinite, all encompassing love. That makes sense. Jesus has spent eternity with the Father and the Spirit bound together in a totally satisfied and all-sufficient love. And even when He left Heaven to come to earth He wasn’t separated from God. His perfect obedience kept the channels open to the very end.

And so it isn’t really surprising that the Father would love the Son – after all His love was perfectly reciprocated. Colossians tells us Jesus was the exact image of the invisible God, having within Himself all the fullness of God.⁴ Jesus was YHWH with skin on so of course the Father loved Him!

But love is very different when it comes to normal people like us. Aside from relationships between small children and their parents most of the people we feel love towards are people who have loved us back. The friends we hang out with are friends who have been friendly. The co-workers we spend time with have been open. While we are stuck with our family experience shows that even there the lovely ones are the ones we invest in.

The love people understand is a love that requires reciprocity and yet Jesus says He loves His disciples with the same love the Father loved Him with.

In Romans it says:

But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

This means that the love that Jesus has for us isn’t like our love, it’s based on identity not performance. You see the Father loved the Son because of who the Son was not because of what He did. And Jesus in turn loves His followers for who we are not what we do. He loves us because He has made us His children.

Paul tells us

If we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17)

And that is where this text starts. It starts with a foundation of grace given identity, but after establishing this identity Jesus is entitled to give His disciples and those of us who follow Him today, a command based on this identity.

Look again with me at verse 9 and this time we will read verse 10 as well.

[Read John 15:9-10]

³ Brunner, D “The Gospel of John” (Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans Pub Co), 2012. pg 888.

⁴ Colossians 1:15-20

Now look how closely Jesus' command is tied to the identity He has just established.

The first words of the command are "Remain in My love". If you are going to remain in something you have to be in something to start with. And so if you are hearing these words as a child of God then the first thing they are going to lead you to do is take a great sigh of relief – phew! There is nothing you have to do, Jesus has already done it.

Commentator Dale Brunner translates these words "Make your home in this special love of mine (and relax)."⁵ That's a glorious picture!

God's children are supposed to be confident that Jesus loves us not because of our performance, but because of who He has made us to be. He has made us friends. But we can't stop there because while this relationship began with grace the words "Remain in Me" are commanding words we must obey.

...

If you look back to the beginning of chapter 15 you find yourself in the very famous "I am the Vine you are the branches" text. And throughout these verses Jesus says "remain in Me as I remain in you, remain in the Vine, remain in Me, let My words remain in you". 8 times He uses this word "remain."

Now it's true you can't remain in the Vine unless you have been grafted in to begin with, but the command to remain implies disobedience is a danger. And indeed in verse 6 Jesus explicitly says:

If you do not remain in Me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned."
(John 15:6)

To be saved Jesus says you must be obedient to remain in the vine.

...

Now I want to draw something out that at first might seem a bit surprising. I'm going to say it first, and then I'll back it up: "If you don't believe in Jesus as your Lord and Saviour Jesus doesn't love you with the love of this passage."

Alright? Now John 3:16 tells us God loved the whole world and that's why He sent Jesus, but this passage isn't talking about that kind of love and it isn't talking about the whole world. Here Jesus is talking to the 11 faithful disciples.

Judas isn't part of this conversation. Now he isn't excluded because His betrayal was too terrible to forgive, Peter's sin was just as bad. He's excluded because He left the table in chapter 13.⁶ He didn't accept Jesus as Saviour and unlike Peter he never came around. He didn't remain.

⁵ Brunner, D "The Gospel of John" (Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans Pub Co), 2012. pg 888.

⁶ John 13:26-30

So Jesus isn't talking about people like Judas, He is talking about people He will later call friends, and Jesus' friends are people who remain in His love.

Sisters and brothers don't miss this; if Jesus isn't the Saviour who forgives you for your damnation worthy sins, then you are not a recipient of the love Jesus is talking about here.

Now, if as you hear this you realize you aren't saved I urge you to remedy the situation. Call out to Jesus for mercy, surrender your life to Him and allow Him to adopt you into His family.

Now we will get into this a bit more down in verses 12 to 17 where Jesus unpacks His command in detail. Verse 12 starts "My command is this" and verse 17 repeats "This is My command." And between these two verses Jesus outlines exactly what it looks like to "Remain in His love." But let's leave the command for now and look at the promised reward in verse 11.

[Read John 15:11]

Here Jesus outlines the motivation for obeying His command.

Jesus says "I have told you this so that..." I've given you this command for a reason, and the reason is – your joy!

Jesus believed obediently remaining true to your God given identity leads to Joy!

And Jesus lived this out. Jesus says "If you keep My commands... just as I have kept My Father's commands... then your joy will be complete" Jesus knows this is true because He lived a life of obedience and is currently tasting the joy it brought.

I'm not sure how many of you saw the movie "Son of God" that came out earlier this year. There are several major things about the movie that I didn't like and that don't line up with what we read in the Scriptures, but one of the things I think they nailed was choosing an actor with a great smile. Jesus looks genuinely joyful throughout the movie in a way that lines up with His words here.

So what do you think? Was Jesus right? Does obedience to your God given identity lead you to joy? Does your life prove it?

...

Now we've differentiated joy from happiness before – happiness depends on happenstance. So when good things happen, like you win the lottery, you are happy. And when bad things happen, like someone you love dies, you are sad.

Joy on the other hand is not dependent on happenstance. It is dependent on identity.

Author and speaker Henri Nouwen once said, “Joy is the experience of knowing that you are unconditionally loved.”

And this is why Jesus could be a man of joy in spite of the fact that He was also a man of sorrow.⁷ Jesus suffered greatly but He knew He was loved by the Father so He obeyed and fixed his eyes on the joy set before Him.⁸

And this is the reward Jesus wants for us as well. He doesn’t want us to be content with the rewards this world offers - with anything less than complete joy, because this is what He won, and He knows it is what we really want.

...

Alright, that’s the progression. Jesus’ friends are those that He loves with the Father’s love because they are His children – that’s their identity. And these friends remain in His love – that’s the command, and they do this for the eternal joy of it – that’s the promised reward.

Now in verses 12 through 17 Jesus unpacks His command to make it clear what our part of the bargain is. He will take care of loving us with the Father’s love – that’s not our concern. And He will insure the reward – that’s His promise. But we have to obey the command.

And that’s because in verse 10 Jesus says “**If** you keep My commands, you will remain in my love” and then in verse 14 He says “You are My friends **if** you do what I command.”

So our “remaining in His love” and “being His friend” is dependent on our obedience to His command.

And what we get between verse 12 and 17 are 5 pictures of what it looks like to be Jesus’ friend and remain in His love – what it looks like to obey His command. Jesus says His friends love each other, they know God’s will, they live out their identity, they bear lasting fruit and they pray prayers that get answered.⁹ Now I want to be a person like that, how about you?

Let’s see what it takes. Verse 12:

[Read John 15:12-13]

⁷ Isaiah 53:3

⁸ Hebrews 12:2

⁹ Outline for the following 5 points adapted from John MacArthur

<http://www.gtycanada.org/resources/sermons/1554/the-friends-of-jesus>

You've probably noticed that Jesus almost always speaks in absolutes. The grace He offers is absolute, the identity He extends is completely free of charge, and the reward He offers is eternal. But then He turns around and requires everything from us in exchange.

Here He says if you are going to be My Friend, if you are going to abide in My love, and you will do this by loving one another as I have loved you.

And then in case that doesn't hit us as hard as it should He says I'm talking about dying here!

...
Pastor John MacArthur tells the story of a young Scottish mother who was carrying her baby when a snow storm came out of nowhere. As she walked she could tell her baby was getting cold and finally she realized he wasn't going to make it. So she took off all her clothes and wrapped them around her baby and then tucked him into the nook of a tree. The next day the people from the town found her cold and naked body but they also found her baby warm and bundled in her clothes. That's the kind of love Jesus is talking about.

In Dickens classic "The Tale of Two Cities" the young Charles Darney gets caught up in the French Revolution and, in spite of his innocence is sentenced to execution. But the night before he is killed his friend Sidney Carton who looked similar to him, made a deal with the prison guard, drugged Darney, changed into his clothes and then took the guillotine for him. When Darney's other friends came to remove his body they found him drugged but alive. That's the kind of love Jesus is talking about.¹⁰

And there are countless stories I could tell of missionaries who died taking God's message of salvation to others. That's the kind of love Jesus is talking about.

...
But let's face it, few of us have ever found ourselves in situations that extreme but Jesus' command that we die for one another still applies. And so if we can't face execution for each other then we must live dying to our preferences preferring each other right here at church. This death, while less glamorous is just as hard.

This kind of love transforms churches full of people who like things the way they like them into churches full of people who look like Jesus. Can you imagine being part of a church like that? Are you willing to make this a church like that?

Jesus says His friends, people who remain in His love, love their faith siblings to the point of death.

...

¹⁰ Both stories adapted from John MacArthur
<http://www.gtycanada.org/resources/sermons/1554/the-friends-of-jesus>

The next characteristic of command obeying people is that they know God's will for their life.

Look at verse 15.

[Read John 15:15]

Now there is a huge elevation of grace that happens in this verse. Jesus takes His disciples who haven't done anything great yet – none of them have died for Him. None of them have even suffered all that much and in fact they are about to desert Him. And He tells them you aren't My servants, you are My friends.

And He tells them they are friends because He has made everything the Father has told Him, known to them.

This is divine knowledge – Jesus says His disciples know God's will. And this is why Jesus isn't in a rush as He speaks. He is so in control that even as He goes to His death He knows everything necessary has been passed on – everything!

Now the disciples didn't have a clue what was about to happen. They didn't know Jesus was about to die and they were about to be scattered, and yet Jesus says they know everything.

This means knowing God's will has nothing to do with knowing how the future is going to play out and everything to do with knowing how to be saved.

Friends we know God's will for our lives. God wills that we find our identity in Him, that this identity leads us to obey, and that we live this way for the reward set before us – That *is* God's will for your life!

When Martin Luther came across this verse tradition tells us he danced for joy and said "God be praised, I know everything that God wants and has at heart; nothing that serves my salvation is concealed from me"¹¹

So I ask you do you know God's will for your life? The evidence that you do is that you are obeying it.

...
Friends, this is everything what matters. While we might like to know the future, really the questions we would ask are totally unimportant. To put this in perspective, 1000 years from now the spouse you chose, the country you lived in, the job you worked will not matter – they won't even cross your mind. But your salvation will.

People who remain in Jesus' love as His friends know God's will for their life and they obey it.

¹¹ In Brunner, D "The Gospel of John" (Grand Rapids: WB Eerdman's Pub Co), 2012. pg 892.

...

The third characteristic of a friend of Jesus is that they live out their identity. Look at the beginning of verse 16.

[Read John 15:16a]

Human friendships are mutually agreed upon. People choose each other as friends. But not Jesus. Jesus is the one who chooses His friends and people who remain in Jesus' love live recognizing Jesus chose them first.

In Ephesians we read:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... for He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. (Ephesians 1:3-4)

This was certainly true of the disciples. Jesus hand picked each of them, calling them to follow, and they obeyed! And He does the same today. If you are a Christian you are someone who lives knowing Jesus initiated the relationship, and you responded.

So have you been hand picked by Jesus? Do you live like it?

Fourth, look at the next part of verse 16.

[Read John 15:16b]

Jesus doesn't just choose His friends, He appoints us to something. The reality is that everyone Jesus chooses has a job. No one is chosen to stop or stand still or get stagnant. If you are following Jesus He expects you to be doing something to build His kingdom – and that is growing His fruit.

And Jesus says the fruit He wants is fruit that endures – fruit that is eternal.

Now what is this fruit? Well it certainly is souls won to Christ, but it is also Christ like character that makes you look like Him to those around you. It is generosity, especially to the poor and downcast that everyone else is prone to reject. It is any good work that you do to or for others because of what Jesus has done for you. All that fruit lasts for eternity.

And we all have different God-given abilities so the fruit we produce is all going to be different. Some of you are gifted to speak and so you teach Bible studies and kids' programs. Some of you are gifted to give and so you are generous with what you have. Some of you are gifted to lead so you put yourself in positions where you can lead people to where God wants them to go. Some of you are gifted to encourage so you write cards and speak words that edify. Some of you

are gifted to pray and so you intercede for the salvation of others. But every friend of Jesus has been chosen to do something good.

Jesus hasn't chosen any of His friends to do nothing. And He certainly hasn't chosen any to sit back and criticize.

Paul says

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

So what good work have you been chosen to do that builds up Jesus' church?

And finally, Jesus' friends pray prayers that get answered. Look at the end of verse 16.

[Read John 15:16c]

Jesus says His friends pray and God answers. Now God isn't your butler or genie in a bottle, Jesus says His friends ask for things *in His name*.

This means we ask for things consistent with His character or that we know He wants us to have. And since His friends know everything that they need to know about salvation we know what to ask for. And when we ask the Father responds!

So Jesus' friends pray things like "Jesus cause your Kingdom to come and your will to be done and use me to make this happen" – they pray that! They pray "Jesus send your Spirit to change my heart so that I will prefer those around me above myself" – they pray that! They pray "Jesus give me Your eyes to see the needs around me and your heart to respond."

These are the prayers that Jesus' friends pray, and when we pray we get results.

Brothers and sisters are you seeing results when you pray? Are you praying for the right things?

Now there is a lot more that could be said on every one of those points but we need to stop there today. What we have seen is that the identity Jesus gives us by loving us unconditionally as the Father loved Him gives Him the authority to command us to remain in His love. A command that means loving one another, knowing God's will, living out our identity, bearing fruit and praying prayers that get answered.

So brothers and sisters do what you were chosen to do, remain in Jesus' love, live as His friend, and obey for the joy of it!