

John 15:12-17, “Being a Friend of Jesus”

4.2.23

Friends. I’m so grateful to have friends, aren’t you? I would suggest to us this morning, that most of us have many acquaintances, but perhaps not as many true friends. Jesus knows all about that. All I have to say is one word: Judas. Not a true friend. The Psalmist said, (foreshadowing what Judas would do to Jesus) in:

Psalm 41:9

Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.

Yes, even a devoted friend may fail us when we need them most. Peter, James and John, they fell asleep on Jesus, three times, three times in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter would go on to deny that he even knew Jesus outside of the High Priest’s house, where Jesus would be held in custody, after His arrest. No, our friendships aren’t always perfect, but His is. He is a friend that sticks closer than a brother.

Friends. So, what makes a trusted friend? Well, one could answer: trust, kindness, honesty, care, concern, loyalty. All of these characteristics would be true and there could be certainly more.

Friends. Today, we’re going to see that Jesus calls those who do what He commands: “**Friends.**” Jesus will say, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” And Jesus did just that. He would go to the cross for you and for me and lay down His life for His Friends.

This Friday is Good Friday. How is it good? After all, Jesus died. That’s awful...but it’s “good” in that Jesus paid our sin debt...laid down His life for those, He would call His friends. And today, He beckons us to be His friend. The title of this morning’s message, (on this Palm Sunday), is: “**Being a Friend of Jesus.**”

John 15:12-17

¹² “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone 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 servants,^[a] for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all 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 should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

The word: “friend” in Greek comes from the word: phileo...from which we get our English word, Philadelphia, “the city of brotherly love.” But the word has a deeper meaning than just “friend.” The Greek derivative that’s used in our passage today is:

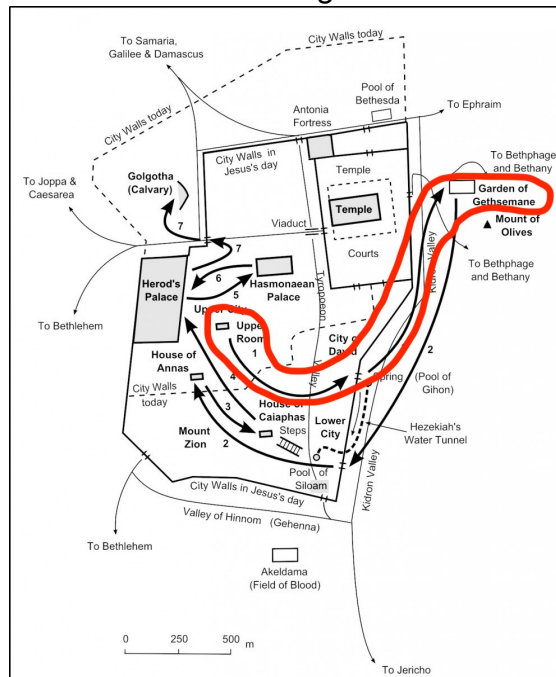
Philos: friend at court

What does that mean? It means you are one who is in the “inner circle,” or “inner court” of a king or an emperor. Hmm. That’s really high-level, right? Indeed, it is...and certainly to be a friend of Jesus is to be a friend with the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords! It doesn’t get any higher than that!

You see, the friends of a king would be close to him and know his secrets...but, they would also be subject to him, right? Why? Because he’s the King! They would obey his commands, as King. Thus, we could say there would be no conflict in this relationship between being a friend and being a

servant at the same time. And that's exactly our relationship with Jesus as His disciples...we're friends, as well as servants.

Now let's remember where we are in John 15...Jesus is walking the Kidron Valley with His disciples...See the chart...see the red lines...starting in the middle:



having left the upper room Jesus is going to the place of prayer...Gethsemane...the lovely little garden on the Mount of Olives, directly across from the Temple. As they're walking, Jesus is continuing to prepare them for what they're getting ready to endure: His betrayal, His arrest and His death, (which we'll celebrate Friday), which ultimately leads to Him rising from the dead, on Sunday.

We're now nearing the end of Passion Week. It's called: "Passion Week" because it's when Jesus showed His passion or love for us! It's now Thursday evening of Passion Week and Jesus is readying His disciples...like a coach prepares his/her team for a championship game. Watch verse 12.

John 15:12

12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Remember, we studied this verse in conjunction with Jesus washing the disciples' feet, back in the upper room. They were arguing about who is the greatest...when He showed them true greatness, by humbling Himself to the role of a servant and washing their dirty feet. He said, "Be like me. Do like me. Love like me. Stoop. Bend. Wash. Love."

Church, why did Jesus come to this earth? You say, "Because He loves us..." That's true, but you'll remember from our time together a few weeks ago...Jesus came to this earth to die for us because God commanded Him to, and out of obedience to the Father, (the Son), Jesus came to die for us. He obeyed His Father because He loved His Father. That's John 14:21, "I love my Father." And Jesus showed the Father's love to His disciples by way of example...giving them and us a pattern to follow. Jesus showed us the way. Jesus showed us how to love...and He has commanded us to love. Jesus said: THIS IS MY COMMANDMENT THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

So, what does that look like?

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never ends.

Remember church, Christian love is more than just feelings. It's an act of the will. Love is sacrifice. It's not true love until there is sacrifice, and the proof of our love is not just our feelings...it's not even just our words...saying, "I love you," it's our actions. It's...

1 John 3:16:

¹⁶ By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

Christian love is an act of the will even when the feelings aren't always there...just like in a marriage. We love even when it gets hard. Yes, Jesus is preparing His disciples for His death. This is going to be hard for them to watch. But it's coming. What Jesus says next is a foreshadowing of His death:

John 15:13

¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

The amazing thing about Jesus' death is that He did it while we were yet sinners. In other words, Jesus died for you and for me before we were born, right? On the cross, Jesus, in His omniscient, all-knowing mind...looked through time and saw us. How? Listen, as enemies. Yes, we were His enemies...born as sinners...separated from God; and yet, He was willing to lay down His life for us.

Romans 5:6-9

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

The wrath of God? Yes, because there had to be punishment for sin. God's wrath falls upon the sinner, because of sin and that's why Jesus had to come...He came as our substitute to take our place and take our punishment! What amazing love!!! Now watch how Jesus' yet again, moves the conversation from love to obedience.

John 15:14

¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you.

Listen, I've said this several times...marking what Jesus was seeking to get across...

Love = Obedience

Obedience = Love

Obedience...I'm afraid we've grown pretty loose in Christendom in regards to obedience to Jesus and His commands. We're not very good at following commands. You know what we're good at? Making excuses as to why we can't obey. We're always trying to find a way out of obedience. Some sort of loop-hole for our circumstances. We are great excuse makers and justifiers.

No, friendship with Jesus involves love and obedience and when we love and obey Him, we'll (as we've seen over the last couple of weeks) bear fruit... I know you understand this, but I will repeat the words of our Lord again: "If you love me, you'll keep my commandments." So, church family, if

the commandments bother you...cramp your style...then you're not loving Jesus. But if you truly love Jesus, your obedience will follow, because obedience is the outflow/overflow of a heart of love.

You want to be close to Jesus? Obey His word. Do what He tells you to do. Oswald Sanders says: "Each of us is as close to Jesus as we want to be." Are you close to Jesus? You will be when you want to be. I've learned this about people...people will do what they want to do. Haven't you found that to be true. If people really want to do something...even if it's hard...they'll make a way. As the generations go by, I'm convinced our appetite for doing hard things for Jesus continues to wane because we're selfish and soft. We've got every excuse in the world not to be committed and dedicated. But, you let it be something that serves my wants, desires or pleasures...I'll make it happen. Lord help us see our blind spots.

Jesus now uses as another analogy in verse 15...watch this...He goes from friends to servants...

John 15:15

15 No longer do I call you servants,^[a] for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

Jesus used the analogy of servant and that word servant is "Doulos" in the Greek it means "bondservant." And it appears 130 times in the N.T. A "Doulos" or bondservant is one who was set free by the owner, but then the servant wanted to stay on with the Master of his/her own accord. And what they would do...is to place their earlobe up against a doorframe and an awl (like a big nail) would be driven through the earlobe making a hole for the servant to wear a ring with the Master's insignia on it, indicating they were staying with the Master of their own free will. Church, that's us. We're bondservants of the King. That's why we call Him: Lord. Master. He's our King-we're servants.

You see, we work for Him, not the other way around. Problem is...so many Christians have tried to turn Jesus into some sort of "divine butler in the sky," making demands. Do this, do that! Chop-chop! No, Jesus is Lord; not you, not me. That's why He was constantly saying, "If you're going to follow me, you're going to have deny yourself." That's what servants do. They do the bidding of their Master.

You know it's interesting how servants often know more of what is going on than almost anyone in the house. Remember when Jesus turned water into wine? Who knew? The servants in the back room. And here's the understanding we need to have about the word "**Doulos, bondservant**": Our freedoms are defined by Him. Our duties are defined by Him. Our convictions are defined by Him. Our words, our actions are to be defined by Him. Why? Because He's the Master...He's the Lord and He bought us with His precious blood.

But, I know, you might be here today and you squirm a bit hearing all of this talk about being a slave, a bondservant to Jesus. But that's what Jesus called Himself. He's described that way in:

Philippians 2:7-8

7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Listen now...this such a profound truth... Jesus was a son who possessed all the glories of heaven but emptied Himself of them to become a slave. Jesus was a SON, who became a slave and we are slaves to sin, who became sons and daughters of God by surrendering our lives to Jesus. Thus, you and I are bondservants; and yet, we will receive all the glories of heaven when our sonship/daughtership is fully realized.

And then Jesus reminds them of something that goes back almost 3 years when He called them...

John 15:16

16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

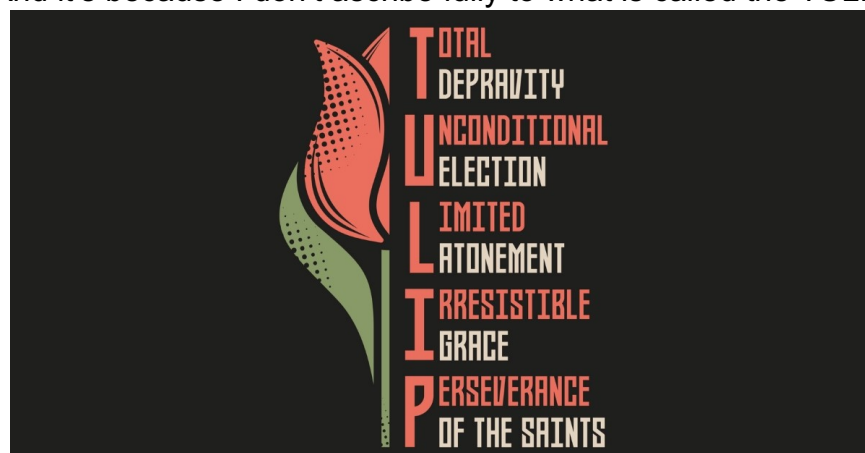
Perhaps, by now, Jesus and the Apostles are beginning to make their way up the Mount of Olives to Gethsemane...and He reminds them that He was the one who chose them. Rabbis choose their students...students didn't choose Rabbis. Remember, the Apostles were nobodies: fishermen, a tax collector, a zealot...men who were seen as low class or worse. He chose them...and He appointed them to go bear fruit for His Kingdom. I like how the great Bible commentator of the 1700's, Matthew Henry, put it. He said:

“You have not chosen me, but I first chose you. Why were they admitted to such an intimacy with him, employed in such an embassy for him, and endued with such power from on high? It was not owing to their wisdom and goodness in choosing him for their Master, but to his favor and grace in choosing them for his disciples.” Matthew Henry Bible Commentary

Now, some folks equate this verse (vs. 16) with Calvinism, and so I'm going to park here for a few moments. Are you familiar with Calvinism? Calvinism is taken from the French theologian, John Calvin, who lived in the 1500's. Calvinism wasn't something that John Calvin pushed himself...it's been pushed more by his followers throughout the centuries and it's the idea that Jesus died only for those who are called the Elect.

In other words, if you're saved, you are "elect," or "chosen." And I'm good with that terminology, because it's biblical terminology, but I want to state something that's critical in understanding the doctrine of election: God, in His omniscient, all-knowing, understanding, being the One who stands outside of time...has seen it all...all of time, as if it's already happened. We, as humans, on the other hand, see time as a moving video...having a beginning and an end. But God sees time like a single picture...a snapshot. It's all there, from beginning to end...totally complete. Why? Because He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

Now, did God choose us to be saved? Yes. But do we have free will to believe upon His Son for salvation. Yes. You say, "How do you square that?" I can't. There are some things our finite minds can't grasp. And this has been an area of contention among good-willed believers for centuries. Am I a Calvinist? No. And it's because I don't ascribe fully to what is called the TULIP. Here it is:



Let's look at it: The "T." **Total Depravity**...I'm good with that...because we're all depraved...we're all sinners. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." I'm okay with the "U."

Unconditional Election. I couldn't earn my salvation if I wanted to. It's the free gift of God. My works, your works are filthy rags to deserve or to be conditions for our salvation.

But, I struggle with the "L." That's **Limited Atonement** and that says Jesus died only for the Elect. His blood only atones for the Elect. Meaning: Jesus didn't die for everyone. But, I have to square that with John 3:16, "For God so loved the world...that He gave His one and only son and WHOEVER believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." No, I believe Jesus' blood atoned for all...all who will cry out to Him to be saved. "For whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Church, I see it this way: God is just and He cannot be just **only** to some people. He is love, and He cannot be loving **only** to some people. He did not create some human beings to be saved, while creating others to automatically be damned to Hell...because that would go totally against the character of God as seen throughout the totality of Scripture...for as Peter stated it in 2 Peter 2:9: "God is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

Then the "I." **Irresistible Grace**. Meaning...you can't resist God's saving grace. Well, folks I see that every Sunday. I see people resisting salvation every week. I can see it in on their faces.

Finally, is the "P." And I'm good with the "P." **Perseverance of the Saints**... meaning if you're truly born again, you'll continue to the end. You'll abide in the vine...remain in Jesus. Why? Because if you're truly born again, you can't lose your salvation and you're more than a conqueror. But listen, we'll still fail...sin...make mistakes...but, we will repent...thus persevering...which is totally unlike what Judas. He didn't persevere, he abandoned Jesus and walked away.

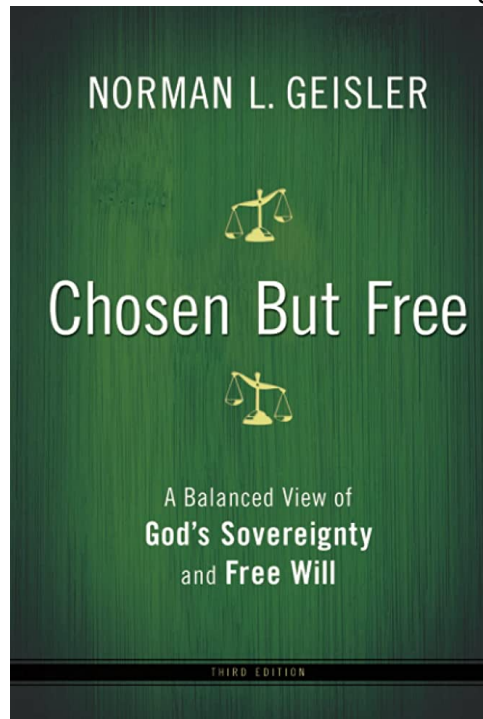
Think of it this way. There's no contradiction in claiming that God knew for sure that Judas would by his own free will, choose to betray Jesus. You see, what Judas did in betraying Jesus cannot be both FORCED and FREE at the same time. And so, for us today, we all have free will and that started in the Garden of Eden when God created Adam and Eve and gave them the choice, (the free will), to eat the forbidden fruit. He didn't make them eat the fruit. They had free will to love God and obey or disobey Him, and that's just like you and me. We are free to love or disobey.

I see it this way



Jesus set the table...placed the food on the table. What does that mean? It means His death on the cross paid our sin debt...He did that, not us... Then His Spirit draws us to Himself...He does that, not us. He then gives us the faith to believe...which is to put the fork in our hand. But, He won't make us eat. He's not going to jam the food into our mouths. You and I must take up the fork and eat. He set the table; but you've got to eat!

So, I guess you could call me a TUP...a T—U—P. ☺ I like how Norman Geisler sums up all of this in his book, "Chosen But Free, A Balanced View of God's Sovereignty and Free Will."



“What then is the connection between God knowing we will believe and God choosing (electing) us for salvation (Eph 1:4)? It is simply this: God knowingly decided and decidedly knew from all eternity who would believe and be saved and who would not. And, ‘in accordance with’ this foreknowledge, He chose to save those who would believe...

There is no contradiction in God knowingly predetermining and predeterminately knowing from all eternity precisely what we would do with our free acts. God determined that moral creatures would do things freely. He did not determine that they would be forced to perform free acts. What is forced is not free, and what is free is not forced. In brief, we are chosen but free.” Norman L. Geisler, *Chosen But Free*

That’s as good a summary as I’ve seen on the subject. But, you may disagree and be a Calvinist and that’s okay. I’ve got friends who are Calvinists...and I’m not going to fall out with them, and I hope they don’t fall out with me. I see it like I do with my Duke buddies. I love my Duke friends...but I just don’t pull for Devils... ☺ You get it. No, I’m not a Calvinist...but, I’m not going to fall out with those who are. Again...this is a complicated issue that’s been argued for centuries and I’m convinced we won’t fully understand the paradox of the Sovereignty of God and the Responsibility of Man until we get to heaven. And I’m okay with that.

What I want you to see is that Judas is not with them. He was a fake...never part of the vine. That’s the point. And so, Jesus and His disciples are going to the place of betrayal and He’s preparing them for what they’re going to see and He’s also reminding them; yet again, that they’re to love one another, and that’s the last verse we’ll see today....verse 17.

John 15:17

17 These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

Church, if we don’t love one another how in the world can we ever hope to convince the lost to trust Jesus? If the world can’t see our love for one another...they’ll never want our Savior...because they’ll think He’s powerless. Yes, Jesus commands us to love one another, because it won’t come naturally in our flesh. Because we’re all crazy and we’re all really hard to love...and that’s why it takes being surrendered to the Holy Spirit to love crazy, nutty people like us. ☺

So, as we close, remember where we started. We started by talking about what a friend is: “a friend at court,” someone who is in the inner court of a King...and that King is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ. Are you a friend of Jesus? Are you in that inner court? Have you surrendered your life to Him? If you have, He calls you “friend.”