

Friend of God - Genesis 18:16-33

Last week, in the first part of chapter 18, we saw that the promises of God and his Word are completely truthful, in fact God's Word is truth, and it is completely reliable. And because of those facts, the Word of God can be "banked on" by those He has called into relationship with Christ. God showed us through his conversation with Abraham, that we can serve the Lord joyfully as we remember God's faithfulness to His Word, and we can trust the Lord fully as we hear the promise of his Word. Those who are in Christ, i.e. Christians, i.e., believers, have a relationship with God and experience benefits from that relationship that non-believers don't. We will see this morning that those who are in Christ are friends of God; they have the benefit of not only calling God Father, and the fatherly love associated with that relationship, but also of calling God friend, and the intimacy shared through a bond of love.

What do we think of when we hear the phrase, "friend of God"? What type of relationship does it bring to mind? Is it a casual relationship like we see, say, between the characters in the TV series *Cheers*? The characters in that show were friends who hung out together at the local bar and had a casual affection for one another that was expressed in jokes, humor, and the occasional tears. Is that a picture of what friendship with God looks like? While I don't think that any creation that comes from the mind or imagination of man can truly and accurately encapsulate all the aspects of what a relationship with God looks like, I think that things like shows, or movies, or books can begin to give us a picture, albeit a dim picture, of what friendship with God should look like.

That being said, I think friendship with God looks more like the friendship portrayed in the animated series, "Toy Story"? Toy Story is at its core, a story of friendship. Friendships are formed between one toy and another and between the toys and Andy, the child who owns them.

One friendship in the story, however, outshines the others - the relationship between Andy and Woody. We see the importance of the friendship and the special bond they share throughout those movies. We know that Woody loves Andy deeply because he belongs to Andy. He is Andy's toy and therefore he knows Andy loves and cares for him. He knows it because Andy talks with him as if he were talking to a friend. Woody knows what Andy likes and does not like. Woody knows Andy's character - his faithfulness, his devotion, his loyalty, his likes, and dislikes. As a result of that bond with Andy, Woody demonstrates the same character traits when he relates to the other toys.

I believe this is a picture of what friendship with God looks like. God has made known to us who He is and what He is like. He has told us what is pleasing to Him. John 15: 14-15 states, "You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, 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."

God is the ultimate friend. He is the ultimate friend because he created us, and we belong to him. But unlike Andy, God knows us intimately because he designed us, created us, and gave us purpose. On top of that, he not only intimately knows us, but he desires to have an intimate relationship with us. And God's desire for us is to relate to him intimately as well. Not only to relate to Him as creatures of the Creator and servants of the King, but as loyal and intimate friends.

What is something that almost all true friendships have in common? Isn't it that those friends have a special bond? Isn't it that those friends enjoy being around one another? Isn't it that those friends enjoy talking with one another?

God desires the same from us. Those that he saves, he calls to not only be his followers but also his friends.

However, because of sin, we often desire friendship with the world more than friendship with God. 1 John 2:15 tells us, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

Yet, throughout the course of redemptive history, we see God relating in intimate friendship with those who are in Christ. Christ is the key to intimate friendship with God. Divine grace, which comes *from* God and *through* relationship with Christ, establishes and completes this friendship.

What evidence of intimate friendship do we see in Genesis 18 between God and Abraham? Through the interaction between God and Abraham in the passage this morning, I think we must understand that friendship with God is established by the grace of God and we also understand that friendship with God is evidenced by intimacy with God.

Look with me at verse 16. We read, "Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way."

Abraham continues to show kindness and hospitality to the visitors. We noted last week that in the earlier verses of chapter 18, Abraham was excited by this visit from the Lord. We saw how Abraham rushed to serve the guests. He was excited to a visit from these special friends.

How do you respond when good friends are coming to visit? Are you excited? Do you hurry around to get things prepared? Why? I imagine it's to make sure they know how much you enjoy their company. It is an honor to host them. So, you go out of your way to show them hospitality. Now imagine the visitors that are coming to visit are not only your close friends, but they are royalty.

That is what just occurred with Abraham. The one true God had shown him favor by establishing a covenant with Abraham. And not only was the one true God showing Abraham that he was with him, but he was also showing Abraham that He, God, loved him. God loves

those who are His. God desires to fellowship with them. If you are His, He desires to fellowship with you. He wants to have a bond of friendship with you.

It is important to note here that although God desires to have a friendship with you, he does not *need* a friendship with you. God has everything he needs within himself, within the Trinity. But he does *desire* a friendship with those he has redeemed.

Let's look now at verses 16-18. We see a continuation of God's friendship and favor toward Abraham.

"The LORD said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?'" First, God is taking council with Himself as to whether He would tell Abraham of His intentions or not. The question *Shall I hide ...?* proves Abraham the 'friend' of God (Isa. 41:8) by our Lord's own criterion. This fact alone indicates that God highly favors Abraham. But it doesn't stop there. The Lord also restates the covenant he just made with Abraham. The repetition of the promise is meant to reinforce in Abraham's mind how intent God is on fellowshiping and befriending his people through Abraham. Psalm 25:14, "The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant."

But how does this fellowship, this friendship with God come about? In verse 19 we read, "For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him."

The expression *I have chosen him* essentially means 'I have made him my friend'. God chooses to redeem Abraham. The Hebrew word translated "chosen" here means "chosen in love". The Lord's friendship with Abraham is established by the grace of God because of the love of God. It is God's action alone, not in any way dependent upon Abraham.

God establishes the covenant with Abraham. God establishes friendship with Abraham. The work of grace is always an act of *God* toward a person. It is applied to the person by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Ephesians 2:8-9, "⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

It is the same for you, if you are saved, if you are a believer. God has chosen you in love. Not because you are more deserving than anyone else. Was Abraham more deserving than anyone else when God called him out of Ur of the Chaldeans. The best we can tell from Scripture, Terah, Abraham's father, and his family were pagan polytheists. This included Abraham. Yet, God chose to establish covenant and friendship with Abraham despite his sin.

If you are a believer in Christ, then God has chosen to establish friendship with you. If you have not trusted in Christ, today is the day of salvation. Repent and believe in the grace and salvation offered through Christ alone. Experience what it is to be a friend of God.

However, relationship with God does not stop there. God does not save us or call us into friendship with Him and then that's the end. He calls us into friendship to experience intimacy with him. We experience intimacy in friendship with him when we draw close to Him as we remember His grace towards us and His sacrifice for us.

The words of Deuteronomy 6:4-5 say, ⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." And as we love God with all our heart, soul, and strength *and* remember the reality of His grace toward us, we will experience intimacy in friendship with Him as we glorify him through our actions.

In the second part of verse 19 we read, "that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him." Although it is true that divine grace establishes and completes our friendship with God, our responsibility to that friendship is not abolished.

We see that in this verse. The Lord chose Abraham, but divine benefits will not come to his children unless they act in righteousness and justice. We are declared justified through faith alone, but the sign that our faith is our devotion to Christ. Actions do matter. They matter as an expression of gratitude to God from *believers*. Those who have been saved glorify God by their works

Eph. 2:10, "¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." John Calvin comments, "For although the grace of God alone begins and completes our salvation; yet, since by obeying the call of God, we fulfill our course, we are said, also in this matter, to obtain the salvation promise by God."

True friendship, i.e. relationship, is evidenced by a desire to spend time with that friend and cultivate intimacy in the friendship.

I believe we can see an example of this in the parent child relationship. A relationship exists between the parent and child. But we all know, from our experiences as children in a family, that no action, nothing we do, will lead to us being removed from the family. Nothing we do, whether good or bad, disqualifies us from being a child of our parents. However, have we not all experienced what it is like when as children we did what our parents wanted? We did what we were told? In other words, we obeyed the commands of our parents. Did it not seem that our fellowship and intimacy with our parents was deeper, richer? For those who are parents, we know that we love our children unconditionally and nothing they do can stop our love for them or disqualify them from being our child. But we are deceiving ourselves if we do not admit that there is a deeper degree of intimacy and fellowship in our relationship with our child when

they are doing the things that we have told him to do. When they are doing the things that please us. When they are obeying us.

Though the analogy is not perfect, because God is the perfect father and we are not perfect parents; yet, Scripture reveals over and over that our intimacy with God is greater and our friendship with God is closer when we are walking more closely with him. In other words, when we are doing the works that we were created in Christ Jesus to do. I want to be clear here. The status of our relationship does not change based upon our obedience. The intimacy in the relationship is strained when sin is not confessed and repented of. But never is the relationship severed. Romans 8:38-39 reassures us of this.

But we struggle to do the things that are pleasing to God, don't we? That is why we must look to the One who did obey God perfectly. The one who enjoyed supreme intimacy and friendship with God. We must look to Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith. Jesus enjoyed intimate friendship with God, and as we look to him in faith, we too can enjoy intimate friendship with God through Christ.

Genesis 18-19 states, "Then the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, ²¹I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know." We know that Sodom and the surrounding cities were wicked and verse 18 and 19 indicate that God is soon going to execute judgment on them for their sin. In fact, in verse 19, the angels turn and head toward Sodom suggesting that they are on their way to execute the judgment.

Abraham understands this is their intent, so in verses 18-22 Abraham asks God to spare the city if at least 50 righteous people are found. He offers a prayer of intercession for Sodom.

One example of a work we were created in Christ Jesus to do is tell and teach the word of God to others. We can most readily do that in the context of our families when we tell and teach our children the word of God. We see God commanding Abraham to do this in verse 19. We see God commanding the same to Moses and the Israelites while they were at Mount Sinai. We read in Deuteronomy 6:6-9, "And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

Another example of a work that we were created in Christ Jesus to do, is to love our neighbor as ourselves. Matthew 22:39, "And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." In the remaining part of our chapter, we see evidence of Abraham's intimacy with God as he displays love for his neighbors, the Sodomites.

We see the intimacy of Abraham and God's relationship here as well. Abraham understands his position in the relationship as he humbly and meekly continues to request that the inhabitants

of Sodom be spared from judgment. Each subsequent request is done with an attitude of reverence and humility. Even so, Abraham comfortable enough with God to make these pleas for the inhabitants of Sodom.

The desire of the righteous for the unrighteous should be that the unrighteous would experience the grace of God and would desire friendship with God.

The Lord chose Abraham as the one through whom He would establish His covenant. He chose Abraham to serve him. But Abraham is more than just the Lord's servant. He is also God's friend. Friendship with God is not a privilege just for Abraham; it belongs to all who follow Jesus. If we trust in Christ, we are God's friends as well.

What about your friendship with God? First of all, do you have a relationship with Christ? Have you placed all of your trust in him who enjoyed perfect friendship and complete intimacy with the father, the son Jesus. If you indeed have a saving relationship with Christ, are you pursuing intimate friendship with God? Are you pursuing God as your Lord and Savior and are you striving to enjoy intimate friendship with him? As you live Coram Deo, before the face of God?

Let us pray.