

Session 9 Friendship with God: The Reward of Love (Jn. 15:15-16)

“Let me drink from the river of Your pleasures as I delight in Your beauty” (Ps. 36:8; 37:4)

I. FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD IS GLORIOUS, YET IT IS RARE AND COSTLY

- A. In calling the apostles His friends, Jesus referred to a great privilege that is rare and yet available to all believers. The greatest reward of love is found in the ability to love more in a deeper friendship.

¹⁴You are My friends if you do whatever I command you...¹⁵but I have called you friends...”
(Jn. 15:14-15)

- B. Jesus did not teach that every believer is a friend of God. This is clear by the warnings that He gave to born again believers in the seven churches Asia (Rev. 2-3). Only three people in the Bible are called a friend of God (Abraham, Moses, John the Baptist). God loves all of His family, but that is not the same as all of them walking in an intimate heart connect and deep friendship with Him.

¹⁴I have a few things against you [Pergamos], because you have there those...who taught... [My people]...to commit sexual immorality...¹⁶Repent, or else I will... fight against them...²⁰I have a few things against you [Thyatira], because you allow Jezebel...to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality...²²I will cast...those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent...”³I will kill her children with death... (Rev. 2:14-16, 20-23)

¹“...you [Sardis]...you are dead...¹⁶...because you [Laodicea] are lukewarm...I will vomit you out of My mouth...¹⁷You are [spiritually] wretched, miserable, poor, blind... (Rev. 3:1-3, 15-17)

- C. Jesus identified laying down one’s life for another as the greatest expression of love (Jn. 15:13). There are two applications to demonstrating “greater love” by laying down one’s life for love. First, Jesus laid down His life *to rescue us* from wrath and darkness (Col. 1:13; 1 Thes. 1:10). Second, He modeled sacrificial love to inspire the Church to display it in serving Him (1 Jn. 3:16).

¹³“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends [to rescue them from trouble].¹⁴You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. ¹⁵No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.” (Jn. 15:13-15)

1. Jesus laid down His life to rescue His people from God’s wrath (1 Thes. 1:10), the domain of darkness (Col. 1:13), and this present evil age (Gal. 1:4).

¹⁰...to wait for His Son...who rescues us from the wrath to come. (1 Thes. 1:10; NAS)

¹³He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us... (Col. 1:13; NAS)

2. John understood that Jesus called the church to embrace “greater love” that would be willing to lay down their life to help others who are facing spiritual or physical danger (1 Jn. 3:16). We are to be willing to sacrificially give our time, money, and possessions, and even risk our life for those at risk (the fatherless, trafficked, refugees, those starving due to famines, etc.).

¹⁶...we know love because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? (1 Jn. 3:16-17)

- D. Jesus explained that a servant does not know what his master is doing, but He made known to them all that the Father showed Him to proclaim. Jesus heard difficult messages that the Father wanted Him to emphasize publicly. These messages resulted in Jesus (and later the apostles) being killed by angry political leaders. The clear implication of 15:15 is that Jesus shared these messages with the apostles because the Father wanted them also to proclaim these after Jesus rose from the dead.

¹⁵No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. (Jn. 15:15)

- E. We can identify about 20 difficult things that Jesus said that very week (see Matthew 21-25). They enraged the political and spiritual leaders of the nation who were in a position to kill Him. Jesus would not be silent on these issues because He knew that His Father wanted them proclaimed. Next, the apostles were to refuse to be silent on these things that the Father wanted proclaimed.

- F. Jesus told them they would have a deep friendship with Him if they obeyed Him—in that context He specifically highlighted two things in 15:13-15. First, He connected their willingness to lay down their life in loving and serving Him and others as a way to participate in friendship with Him (15:13-14). Second, He was calling them to stand publicly with what the Father told Him (15:15).

- G. This invitation to friendship with God is for any who obey two things—be willing to sacrifice their life and resources *to rescue people* for love (15:13) and *to promote the messages* that God wants emphasized (15:15). This is the context for Him saying, “if you do what I command you” (15:14).

- H. When Paul wrote of “the fellowship of His sufferings”—it included him obeying these two things.

¹⁰that I may know Him and...the fellowship of His sufferings... (Phil. 3:10)

- I. In 15:15, Jesus prophesied their friendship with Him—knowing they would be faithful unto death in their love for Him. That night, He assured them of a place in His future government because they “*continued with Him in His trials*” (though they abandoned Him that night: Mt. 26:31; Jn. 16:32).

²⁸“You...continued with Me in My trials. ²⁹And I bestow upon you a kingdom...” (Lk. 22:28-29)

- J. The Lord calls some of His servants to function as “agents of rescue” for people who are in spiritual or physical danger. Some ministries are called to rescue people who are in danger or in great need. Missionaries living in hostile lands risk their lives to rescue people from spiritual danger by sharing the gospel with unbelievers there. Some ministries are called to rescue people from physical danger related to human trafficking, natural disasters, starvation, terrorism, civic or military violence, etc. Such people risk their lives to help others—even as the believers who hid the Jews from the Nazis.

¹⁰If you show yourself lacking courage on the day of distress, your strength is meager.

¹¹Rescue those who are being taken away to death... ¹²If you say, “See, we did not know this,” does He who weighs the hearts not consider it?...Will He not repay [one] according to his work? (Prov. 24:10-12 NAS)

⁷“...you shepherds... ⁸My sheep have become a prey...and because My shepherds have not searched for My sheep... ¹⁰I am against the shepherds, and I will require My sheep at their hand...I will rescue My sheep... ¹²from all places they have been scattered...” (Ezek. 34:7-12; ESV)

II. THE REWARD OF LOVE: DEEP FRIENDSHIP

- A. The reward for loving God is to experience more love for God and a greater nearness to His heart, with more insight and participation with Him in what He is doing on the earth. Friendship with God in this age is one of the “ultimate rewards” of radical obedience to Jesus. It speaks of the deepest measure of intimacy with Him as He gives His friends access to the dearest things of His heart.
- B. The idea of “rewards” is a trigger word for some. Jesus promised rewards to *motivate* His people to greater faithfulness. Some dislike this subject because they *feel pressure* by thinking that they could have more in God if they lived differently. It *confuses* some who see gaining rewards as “earning” something which seems contradictory to grace and the free gift of salvation by faith.
- C. Jesus exhorted us to live in a way that the Father will reward (Mt. 6:4,6, 17; 10:42; 16:27; Lk. 6:23). Rewards express how Jesus feels about the way we loved Him, not about “being over others.” Jesus gave over 50 references to eternal rewards—making it one of His most emphasized themes (Mt. 5:5, 12, 19; 6:4, 6, 18, 20; 10:41-42; 16:27; 18:4; 19:21, 28, 30; 20:26-27; 23:12; 25:21, 23; Mk. 9:41; 10:21, 43-44; Lk. 6:23, 35; 9:48; 12:8; 21, 33; 14:11; 16:11; 18:14, 22; 19:17, 19; 22:30; Jn. 12:26; Rev. 2:7, 10-11, 17, 26-27; 3:4-5, 11-12, 18, 21; 16:15; 19:7-8; 20:4, 6; 22:5, 12). In Revelation 2-3, Jesus highlighted 22 eternal rewards (Rev. 2:7, 10, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21).

⁴“...your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father...will Himself reward you openly...

⁶pray to your Father...and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly...

¹⁷when you fast...¹⁸your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.” (Mt. 6:4, 6, 17)

²²“...when men hate you...for the Son of Man’s sake...²³your reward is great in heaven...” (Lk. 6:22-23)

²⁷“The Son of Man will come...He will reward each according to his works.” (Mt. 16:27)

¹²“I am coming...My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.” (Rev. 22:12)

- D. We are commanded to believe that the Lord rewards those who seek Him (Heb. 11:6). There is great reward in cultivating a radical lifestyle of faith and obedience (Heb. 10:32-35).

⁶“...he who comes to God must believe that...He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him...” (Heb. 11:6)

³²“...you endured a great struggle with sufferings... ³³both by reproaches and tribulations...

³⁴knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.

³⁵Therefore, do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. (Heb. 10:32-35)

- E. Paul gave us details about our appointment at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). The gift of righteousness based on the Jesus’ death on cross is our foundation. We are saved as a free gift by faith in Jesus’ work on the cross, but we are rewarded according to our works.

⁸Each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor... ¹²If anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³each one’s work will become clear...it will be revealed by fire... ¹⁴If anyone’s work...endures, he will receive a reward.

¹⁵If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved. (1 Cor. 3:8-15)

III. SCRIPTURE EXHORTS US TO EXTRAVAGANT FAITHFULNESS AND DILIGENCE

- A. Jesus did not apologize for calling people to wholeheartedness. Today, many ministries will avoid the call to radical obedience and to zealously seek the Lord in the Word and prayer. The lifestyle of radical faith and obedience is one of the primary conditions in having a friendship with God. The King desires the beauty of His Bride that He sees in her devotion to Him (Ps. 45:10-11).

¹⁰*Listen, O daughter...forget your...father's house; ¹¹then the King will desire your beauty. (Ps. 45:10-11)*

- B. At the end of Paul's life, while in prison, he *pressed* for the prize of the upward call (Phil. 3:12, 14). As the premier teacher on grace, Paul exhorted believers to press into God for this personal prize.

¹²*...I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ...laid hold of me [the fullness of my destiny]... ¹⁴I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God... (Phil. 3:12-14)*

- C. We are running a spiritual race with our heart, not with our legs. Paul was very concerned not to be disqualified from receiving "the prize" or the fullness of what God called him to (1 Cor. 9:24-27). He was not concerned about losing his salvation but not receiving the fullness of God's call for him.

²⁴*...[run to] receive the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it... ²⁶I run thus: not with uncertainty [lack of focus]. ²⁷But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. (1 Cor. 9:24-27)*

- D. In Scripture there is various terminology for walking in deep intimacy and friendship with God:

1. One's life choices being "called great" by God (Mt. 5:19).
2. Jesus will say to some, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Mt. 25:21).
3. Paul spoke of pressing toward the goal for "the prize" of the upward call of God (Phil. 3:14).
4. Jesus spoke of a lifestyle that *the Father loves* or greatly enjoys (Jn. 14:21, 23; 16:27).

- E. Three times Jesus said "the Father loves" those who love Jesus by obeying Him (14:21, 23; 16:27). He was referring to a very specific blessing—that some are loved by the Father "because of" their extravagant response of obedient love. The idea of God loving us "because" we love Jesus confuses some by seeming to contradict the truth that we love God because He first loved us (1 Jn. 4:19).

²¹*"He who...[obeys]...is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father..." (Jn. 14:21)*

- F. Jesus spoke of two distinct expressions of God's love for His people:

1. **#1 God so loves the world in fullness** (Jn. 3:16). The Father loves all people in the world *redemptively* in the sense of valuing, caring for, and pursuing them. God so loved the world with His infinite and everlasting love—He proved it by sending His Son to die for us. His love for all the people in the world is not caused or motivated by their response to Jesus.
2. **#2 He loves or enjoys His relationship with those who obey Him.** The Father enjoys and esteems the life choices and fruit of those who obey Jesus. He enjoys His relationship with them and delights in working "with them" in partnership (Mk. 16:20).

¹⁷*"...My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again." (Jn. 10:17)*

- G. The invitation to be a “friend of God” creates the tension that Jesus referred to when He said, “Blessed are they that mourn” (Mt. 5:4). This mourning refers to the pain that we feel when we see “the gap” between what God has made available to us and what we are actually experiencing.
- H. ***Mourning and joy***: We hold these two truths in tension. We rejoice in who we are in Christ and what we are experiencing in God, while we are aware of how much more there is to experience.

IV. FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD: ABRAHAM, MOSES, AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

- A. John the Baptist’s life is the model of friendship with God. John described his message, lifestyle and ministry style as a *friend of the Bridegroom*. Jesus set forth John as a model of radical obedience referred to as “spiritual violence.” God requires spiritual violence to experience the *fullness* of all is available in God. To “suffer” violence means that God permits (and rewards) it in our pursuit of God. It is violent because it confronts our sinful desires and “violently” reorders the way we talk, spend time and money, and pursue comfort and success.
- ²⁹“...but the friend of the Bridegroom, who stands and hears him...” (Jn. 3:29)
- ¹²...the kingdom of heaven suffers [permits] violence, and the violent take it by force. (Mt. 11:12)
- B. Abraham was called a friend of God. He was persistent in believing in God’s promises even when they were delayed many years—he believed without wavering or quitting (Rom. 4:20-21). God told Abraham to leave everything and move to a foreign land without telling him where he was going. He waited many years for the son that God promised him. His son Isaac represented many of God’s promises to him. God commanded Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice on the altar (Gen. 22).
- ²³Abraham believed God, and...he was called the friend of God. (Jas. 2:23)
- ²⁰He [Abraham] did not waver at the promise of God...giving glory to God, ²¹and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. (Rom. 4:20-21)
1. Abraham’s expression of friendship was seen in his unwavering faith in God’s promises. One challenging area in a believer’s life is to stay engaged long term in believing promises from God about their personal life that initially ignite their spiritual life with zeal. After those promises are delayed for years, it is easy to lose confidence and fall into spiritual passivity.
 2. Abraham gave glory or thanks to God for His promises, thus expressing his faith that what God said was reliable—that His leadership was excellent. He refused to believe that God’s leadership was flawed. Jesus was moved and amazed the faith of the centurion (Mt. 8:10).
- C. As a friend of God, Moses made many costly choices to suffer afflictions that were associated with God’s people instead continuing in the pleasures of sin that were available to him because of his great wealth that he had as a prince in Egypt. No one can make costly choices like this for us. Moses waited for God’s intervention for 40 years in the wilderness after he left his treasure in Egypt.
- ¹¹So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. (Ex. 33:11)

²⁴By faith Moses...²⁵choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, ²⁶esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward...²⁷he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. (Heb. 11:24-27)