

Promises

For

Now And Evermore

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Promise for Friendship

John 15:12-17 is one of the richest and most cherished promises to be found anywhere in the Bible. It promises friendship with Jesus. Now let that sink in. We're talking about the same Jesus who put the stars throughout the universe, and who along with God, the Father, according to Colossians 1:15-20, set this earth in place and gave mankind life.

We're talking about the One that scripture calls the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, we're talking about the Supreme Being of the universe. Jesus says in John 15, "You are my friends." You talk about having friends in high places, they don't come any higher.

We're going to focus on that promise today in how rich and meaningful it is. Let's start with the idea about friendship. What is a friend? There are all kinds of definitions. Someone says a friend is someone who's coming in when everybody else is going out. Somebody said a friend is somebody who'll buy your lunch, even if they don't have an expense account. That's pretty good.

Erma Bombeck said, "A friend is somebody who won't go on a diet when you're fat." I've always liked her definition. Somebody else said, "False friends are like shadows. They're close to us when the sun shines, but in the darkness they disappear."

I remember when I was in undergraduate school, I had a psychology professor tell us that if you really had three dear close friends, you were rich beyond measure. When I heard that the first time, I kind of shrugged that off and laughed and thought what a crazy theory because I had lots of friends. But as I listened to the explanation of what real friendship is and as experience taught me those lessons, you begin to wonder: Do I have three real friends?

Do you know what a friend is? Here it is: Friends are two people who love each other. That's it. Friends are two people who deeply love each other. Now friendship is not an exclusive relationship. You can be a friend with somebody and have another relationship with them. For example, my wife is my best friend. I love her deeply because she's my wife, but I love her deeply anyway. I share with her, and she shares with me. We're friends.

I think it's good for a parent to be a friend to a child and a child to a parent, as long as that does not prohibit that parent from carrying out the parental responsibilities. You can be a friend to the person you work for. You can be a friend to people who work under you. You see the only criteria for friendship is two people who love each other, two people who deeply love each other.

Read John 15:12-17 again, Jesus talking to his disciples said "You are my friends." But, I want to show you what is at the start of this passage and what is at the end of it.

Verse 12 says "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." Verse 17 states "This is my command: Love each other." Do you see how love is at the beginning of this business about friendship and love is at the end of it? Somebody said, "Love is the wrapping paper in which friendship comes." That's right. If somebody is my friend and I love him and he loves me, I will naturally be giving to them and they in turn will be giving to me. That's friendship. If you see a relationship where only one person is giving, it's not friendship. That's false. But if there is a mutual giving each to the other, then you've got a friend.

1. Jesus gives us friendship "You are my friends." (verse 14) What does Jesus give us in friendship? How can He make that claim? What's He done for me? How can He claim to be my friend? First of all, He has given to us, Himself.

Verse 13 says, "Greater love has no man than this, than he lay down his life for his friends." That's hard to argue with, isn't it? How on earth could I better prove my friendship to you than if I were willing to literally sacrifice my life, take it away in order to save you?

Friends often sacrifice things for another friend. We sacrifice money, we sacrifice time, we sacrifice our feelings, we may sacrifice some of our worldly goods, but very few times in history will a friend literally sacrifice a life for another friend. The most amazing thing about this is, Jesus made that sacrifice before we were his friends. In fact, he made the sacrifice so that we could become his friends.

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." (Romans 5:6) He had to initiate it. We couldn't do a thing until he made that initiation. Verse 7 states a basic fact of life, "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die." You see that every now and then, somebody will die for a friend. If it's a mutually giving relationship, every now and then somebody will lay that down., "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Verse 8) The amazing thing is, Jesus died for us before we were his friends. He died for us while we were his enemies.

How can that be? Because while we were still sinners and sin by definition is enmity to God. My friend, he died so that I could become his friend. The first thing He gave us was himself.

2. He gives us knowledge and insight. "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." (John 15:15) Jesus is near the end of his life. The apostles and the other disciples have been following him, and to them He has been the master.

Two chapters prior to this in John 13, when Jesus came into that upper room, they were all sitting around prideful. Nobody would take a basin and wash each other's feet, as was their custom. Jesus picked up the towel and the basin, he went around and washed each of his disciples' feet to their shame. At the end of that he said, "I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master..." (John 13:16) Now that you've seen the master do this, follow my example.

He said the same thing in Matthew 10:24 talking to them, "No servant is greater than his master..." You see for three years, Jesus had these men following him basically in a master/servant relationship, but now in the last week of his life, knowing that his mission is nearing completion, He tells them and by implication tells us: I don't call you servants anymore, because you see servants don't know the master's business, but friends do.

The word "servant" there means slave. If you go back into the era and time frame in which Jesus was living and teaching, a servant or bond slave was just a living tool. Nothing was ever explained to a slave. There was no relationship between a master and a slave. You just did what you were told. There were no questions asked. Somebody said, "Do this," you just did it. If you didn't do it, you might die. But Jesus said, that time is finishing now, because I'm sharing with you what I'm all about. I want you to know my mind, I want you to know my heart, I want you to know my plan, and I want you people to be chief in my kingdom.

Do you see that's the difference? A friend knows what another friend thinks. A friend knows what another friend wants. A friend knows what another friend feels. A friend knows what another friend's goals are. Jesus said, there was a time when you didn't understand. In fact, they did not understand as He was explaining. They wouldn't understand until a few days later, after the Resurrection, but they were nearing that point of understanding.

Now the great news is that even though we weren't with the 12, and we didn't sit at Jesus' feet physically, our friend, Jesus, has given us understanding. He has shared with us his purpose. He shared with us his plan. He shared with us his expectations. He shared with us his intent to return. He shared with us that He's made a reward on the other side, and in addition to the Word he's even given us the gift of the comforter, the Holy Spirit that he talked about in this same reference to help lead us in all truth.

Now don't misunderstand, we don't know everything. It is not the intent of God for us to have the mind of God in totality, our feeble little finite minds couldn't handle that. But the good news is, we're friends because he's not keeping us in the dark, he's given us understanding.

3. Jesus gives us status "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit---" Our friend has given us status, and he can do that because he is king.

The idea of a monarchy is an awfully difficult concept to us. We don't live in the reigns of kings. We see the pomp and circumstances associated with British royalty, but we know that's all just a figurehead. We live in an age where friendship with a high public official can sometimes be a precarious thing, because public accountability puts influence peddling and favors from friendship under great scrutiny, doesn't it? But keep in mind, Jesus didn't live under a democracy, and in that time and that place, there were no democracies around. They were unknown. People lived under monarchies and those who

were friends of the king had unbelievable status. It was just different because anything the king wanted on a whim, anything the king said was law. No questions asked, so friends of the king could and would freely ask for favors, special considerations, amnesties, appointments, and it would be given to them without question. Why? Simply because they were friends of the king.

You and I have a hard time understanding that. It didn't have to be based on any merit or on any ability. They were friends of the king. Jesus said, the great news, I've chosen you to be my friends. You didn't have any merit, you didn't have any ability, but I'm the king and I'll choose you to be my special friend.

There is no feeling quite like being chosen out from among others, is there? Because of my height, most all of you know I used to play basketball. But, I grew before I ever had any coordination. I remember when I was little boy, I wanted to play with the bigger boys because I was about their height, but I was awfully clumsy and awfully skinny. I would go down to the boy's club and want to play. They would start picking out teams. Have you ever stood in line to play in some softball or basketball game and watch them pick every other kid in the line, and you're just standing there with that head sinking lower because you were not one of the ones picked? Many a time I would go out there and they'd choose the teams and I was still left standing.

But there was one guy who was three years older than I who was a great athlete and he also lived two doors down, and was my buddy. Every now and then, he got to be captain. About the second or third pick, out of pure mercy and grace, he would say, "I'll take Flatt." Boy you talk about smile, I'd walk over there and get in line. I didn't deserve that, I didn't merit that, but you see the status was given because of friendship from the king.

4. Jesus gives us power "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit---fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name." (verse 16) Isn't that great? He says, when you're my friend, you ask it in my name, and I'm going to supply those things. Now if you're a new Christian you may not understand. This is not some kind of "Carte-Blanche" for selfishness. Well great, Jesus, give me this, give me that. No, he says, what you ask in my name, "in my name" means under my authority and within the scope of my will. He says, as you become my friend and as you ask for those things you know I would love for you to have, here's the promise, I'm going to give them to you.

He gave himself, his very life. He gives us understanding that we could have from no other source. He gives us status. He lifts us up in a way that no other human being on the face of the earth could, and he gives us power that could come in great measure from no other individual.

But what do we give him? Remember "Friendship is two people loving each other, and two people giving to each other."

A. My obedience. This is a conditional promise for Jesus said, "You are my friends, if you do what I command." When you read that at first blush, it makes you think "huh," some kind of friendship as long as you do everything I say. Sounds more like the master/servant relationship. No! No! It's not that at all. Simple fact of the matter is, we've got a friend in Jesus who is so superior, so exceedingly more knowledgeable and so exceedingly more powerful that his asking for our obedience is simply for our benefit and for our betterment.

Let me liken it this way. Suppose you had a close friend who was a jet airplane pilot, you know one of those big jumbo jet pilots. Have you ever been in the cockpit of one of those things? Switches and dials and knobs all around. Imagine he let you go in the cockpit with him for a flight, pilot and co-pilot, and you were sitting in there and he would probably tell you, at least if I'm flying in the plane I hope he would: "Don't touch any of these, okay! Just sit and watch." That's his command. "In a minute when we get up, I'll show you one you can touch, but don't you touch anything until I tell you to touch it, all right?" Remember you're privileged just to be here in the cockpit. Now if you're this man's friend and you get up in the air and you just reach over and start flipping all those dials, now what's going to happen?

You see the point is, that's not being a friend, that's being a fool! You're not his friend, you're not even your own friend if you deliberately disobey and cause that which leads to your own destruction. Jesus said, look I'm not trying to be demanding in the sense of being some kind of ruthless monarch, I just want you to obey me, it's going to be for your benefit, and that will be what you give back to me as my friend.

B. Produce some fruit. "You didn't choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to bear fruit, fruit that will last." (verse 16) Your obedience to his will is going to bear fruit, it's just going to lead to a changed life. It's going to lead to behavior. Why would he want you to bear fruit? So that other people will be led to that same friend you have. That's the main reason fruit needs to be born in my life. That's the reason my life needs to be changed as a Christian. That's the reason you live to a higher standard and march to the beat of a different drummer. Number one reason is, so that other people all around me will be drawn to the same friend that I have.

When you become a friend of Jesus, there's not a burden you have that you cannot take to him in prayer that he will not begin to lift as you take it to him. "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." (Hebrews 2:18) How does he do that? I don't know. There are some things we don't have the capacity to understand. But Hebrews 2:18 says, if I take that which troubles me, which tempts me and place it before him, he will begin to take that burden away.

Jesus also promises us this friendship, "Therefore I command this, love one another." (verse 17) If Jesus is my friend, and I truly do love him as a friend, the beauty is that will empower me to love other people who are also his friends in a way that the world really can't understand. But you can love me as your friend because we both share the same friend. What a friend we have in Jesus. Isn't that great? What a precious promise in John 15. *Amazing Grace #1164 - Steve Flatt, June 19, 1994*