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Servants and Friends

John 15:15-17

Intro: ([Gen 18:1-8, 16-19](#)) We've read this excerpt from Genesis because it directly relates to our text in [ch15](#). Jesus has just called His disciples friends and He did so in regards to our relationship with Him. Of course, He uses this term to speak to the disciples on a human level in terms that they can understand but we must not interpret this word "friends" in a limited way. We all have people in our lives that we call friends but they may really be no more than good acquaintances. In the Greek, this is a strong word that means someone who is dear (actively fond of). It's used of the best man at a wedding in [Jn 3:29](#). It also means "a friend at court," describing a member of the inner circle of a king or emperor. The "friend of the king" would be one who is closest to the king, one who would be privy to his secret plans and thoughts. At the same time, he'd still be subject to the king and required to obey his commands.

As I pointed out last week, this is the first time in John's Gospel that Jesus uses this term and, as such, it is important. But, as exciting as this is, it's even more significant when we realize that there are no other characters in the entire Bible that are called the friends of God except Abraham ([James 2:23](#)). James got this notion from passages like [II Chron 20:7](#) and [Isa 41:8](#) where God Himself declares that Abraham was His friend. The significance of this term in Abraham's case is that God spoke freely to Abraham and repeatedly opened his mind to know Him and His plans. The perfect illustration of this is seen in [Gen 18](#). But, not only does this passage help us understand what it means to be a friend of God, it also sheds light on what Jesus is saying in the first verse of our text today.

15- Jesus says He will no longer call them servants. This statement may be confusing to some, especially in light of the fact that we are suppose to call Jesus our Master (and act accordingly) which certainly implies that we are His servants. The answer is in the Greek word interpreted as servant. The word actually means a slave. Jesus hasn't actually used this term of the disciples before this, although [13:16](#) comes awfully close. The characteristic of a slave that Jesus points out here is that he doesn't know his master's business. The slave is no more than an instrument. It's not his place to enter

intelligently into his owner's plans and purposes; his job is just to do what he's told to do. But this is not the pattern of relationship that exists between Jesus and those who follow Him. Jesus has called them friends and He has kept nothing back from them. He's revealed to them all that the Father's made known to Him.

But, is it possible to be both a friend and a servant? If so, what would that look like? We've already seen this in our reading of [Gen 18](#). The Lord and 2 angels came to visit Abraham on their way to investigate the sin of Sodom. Even though Abraham was almost 100 yrs old, he still interrupted his noonday rest to greet these visitors and attend to their comfort by serving them a wonderful meal. In [vs1-8](#), Abraham is on the move. Twice, he even refers to himself as a servant. He hurries and runs about and encourages others to do their work quickly as well, a great example of a servant. He didn't even sit down to eat with his guest. Like a true servant, he stood nearby, ready to do their bidding.

In [vs16-19](#), the atmosphere changes as Abraham is quietly standing still, speaking with the Lord. He's still a servant but now he is being a friend. "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?" the Lord asked rhetorically. Obviously, the answer was no because the Lord goes on to reveal the coming destruction of Sodom to Abraham and Abraham, knowing that Lot was in Sodom, takes it upon himself to intercede for all the righteous who lived in that vicinity.

As a friend of God, Abraham shared in God's plans and secrets, not all of them of course, but the ones that related to him and those who were important to him. Communication is essential to friendship. Friends speak to one another. They bare their souls and tell their troubles. They share their aspirations. It's no surprise then that in this upper room discourse, Jesus, the Lord of glory, shared His thoughts with His friends. He's already told the disciples of His death and resurrection, of His return to His Father in heaven, the coming of the Holy Spirit after His ascension, and other doctrines. He declares that they are His friends because, "all things I have heard from My Father I have made known to you." He has kept nothing back from them. He has revealed to them all that the Father has made known to Him.

Clearly, our friendship with Jesus involves love and obedience, but it also

involves knowledge! He lets us in on His plans. Yes, He's our Master but He doesn't treat us as slaves. He treats us as servants if we do what He commands.

Abraham was God's friend because he obeyed God ([Gen 18:19](#)). If we spend our time cultivating a friendship with the world, we will experience enmity with God ([James 4:1-4](#)), breaking our close fellowship with Him. Lot was saved but he's never called a friend of God and although the Lord rescued him from destruction, He didn't reveal His plan to Lot until the very last minute and, it seems, only because Abraham had first interceded for him.

One of the greatest privileges we have as friends of Jesus is getting to know God better and being privy to His secrets. You might say, "How is this possible?" Well the truth is: "each of us is as close to God as we choose to be." We are His friends and we should constantly seek to be near His throne, listening to His Word, enjoying His intimacy and obeying His commands. In [II Sam 23:15-17](#), David expressed his longing desire for a drink of water from the well of Bethlehem, his home city. 3 of his mighty men were close enough to hear his sigh and they risked their lives to bring their king the water he desired. This is what it means to be a friend of the king – close enough to hear His desire. But, being willing to graciously submit and faithfully obey His will is what it means to be His servant!

One aspect of human friendship is the freedom we have in choosing who will be our friend and who will not. This freedom is normally exercised by both parties involved. When we meet another person, 3 reactions are possible so far as friendship is concerned. 1st) We might not like them and they might not like us. If so, we try to be polite but no friendship develops. 2nd) We may like them but they may not like us, or vice versa. In this case, no friendship grows unless the one who dislikes the other changes their mind. 3rd) There could be mutual attraction. Only then will the people involved become friends. This implies that we have a choice in the matter, and so does the other person. We consider this essential to friendship. Yet, in striking contrast to our understanding of human friendship, Jesus stresses that we have become His friends, not because we've chosen Him (because we didn't), but because He in His great mercy has chosen us.

16- Do we think that we have chosen Him? If so, we've not fully recognized the depth of our own depravity or the unmerited nature of God's grace. The

true situation is that we have not only failed to be His friends; we've actually become His enemies, having rejected His rightful rule over us and rejected His love for us. This friendship with Jesus is only established when God acts in Christ to remove the barrier of our sin and rebellion. It's only after Jesus has spoken of giving His life that He calls the disciples His friends. He reminds them that they only have this privileged position because of His grace. Do we think it's our decision to accept Christ that brings us to a place of friendship with Jesus? If so, we're wrong. It's not us that hold the initiative in our relationship with Christ, it's Jesus who does.

Clearly, friendship with Jesus is different than any human friendship we've ever had in that Jesus chose us Himself. There is another difference in this divine friendship and it's seen in the purpose for which He has chosen us to be His friends. Jesus says, "I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit..." He also commands them to love each other in the next verse. From our understanding of human friendship, doesn't it seem strange that Jesus talks about choosing His friends so that they can do something for Him and then (even worse) immediately follow up this declaration with a command? We'd never choose a friend just for what they could do for us. That's just crass manipulation. It's not the character of true friendship. Besides, we'd never think of commanding our friend to do something, not if we wanted to keep them as our friend.

So, how can Jesus do this? Is His friendship something less than human friendships? Is He just pretending to be our friend? The answer concerns the nature of the friendship involved. While our friendship with Jesus is a true and real friendship, it is actually not a friendship between 2 equals but between sinful and limited human beings and God. Thus, the full dimension of our relationship always includes both our sin, ignorance, and limitations as well as God's holiness, omniscience, and total sovereignty. We are God's friends, but only by grace. That means we have no right to approach God as His equal or dictate the terms of our friendship. It means that we must always approach Him in gratitude, keeping in mind that this friendship exists only because He has stooped down to our level of existence.

When we see our friendship with Jesus in its proper perspective, we begin to grasp that the purposes He offers here are not qualifications for that friendship but are actually the glorious privileges of all those whom Jesus calls friends. He says, "I chose you and appointed you..." appointed is the

act of setting someone apart for special service. What is the special service He has appointed us to do? To go into the world and to bear fruit. He has appointed us to be His emissaries, His ambassadors to the world, to share the gospel with them and be living examples of godly character. Jesus says we are to go and to bear fruit but then He qualifies the type of fruit He expects from us: lasting fruit.

Jesus has mentioned fruitfulness all throughout this chapter, but this point takes it a step further than all previous mentions. Fruitfulness has a 4-fold progression in **ch15**. 1st) fruit (**2a**) This is primarily those character traits that Holy Spirit works to produce in the life of the believer but also refers to good works and winning souls. 2nd) more fruit (**2b**) This points to the danger of self-contentment. Too often, we are happy with just a little fruit but regardless of what victories we may have won or blessings we may have experienced in the past, God always has more in store for us in the areas of maturing in Christian character, service to Him, soul-winning and other blessings. 3rd) much fruit (**8**) Jesus says this is what brings glory to God. Do we believe Him? Then we should be striving to achieve much in our Christian walk, through the Spirit's power, because a little fruit only brings a little glory to the Father and to the Son.

4th) fruit that remains (**16**) Not all fruit does. In agricultural terms, no fruit really lasts. Pears perish, apples rot, berries, oranges, and grapefruit spoil. In human terms, a lot that we do belongs in this same category. We work, but much of our work and the fruits of that work pass away. Eventually, we pass away. Does anything remain? Does all pass? One thing remains: the fruit produced in our lives by Jesus Christ. He's eternal and His work is also eternal and it will never perish. Man-made fruit eventually disappears but whatever is born of the Spirit of God has the mark of eternity on it and will remain. It's possible to build great Christian monuments out of wood, hay and stubble. A hay-stack can be quite a large thing but it will never last. But, if we build our lives on eternal things – the gold, silver and precious stones that are provided by God and assembled in us by Jesus – that fruit will last for all eternity.

The 2nd purpose for Jesus calling us His friends is the privilege of answered prayer. We've already heard this before but He mentions it again because we need to hear it and because we are lax in our prayer life. In keeping with our analogy from **vs15**, the friends of the king are certainly able to speak to

their sovereign and share their burdens and needs with him. In the old days of monarchies, it was considered a special honor to be invited to speak to the king or queen but the friends of Jesus can speak to Him any time. The throne of grace is always open and available to them.

Jesus is not just referring to our personal petitions of prayer as in previous mentions of this truth. The context of this passage points to an additional aspect of prayer – intercession: prayer offered up for others. What could be more natural or expected for those graciously brought into friendship with Jesus than to earnestly pray for others who are also Christ's friends? If they are friends of Jesus then they are our friends too and we must pray for them as they also must pray for us.

17- Again, Jesus commands love among the disciples. Jesus is about to go away from them and when He leaves, they are not to disband or turn against each other. Jesus isn't just preparing them to stay together; He's commanding them to love one another. In fact, all the instructions and directives previously given are for a single purpose – that the disciples may engage in mutual love for one another. What does this kind of love look like?

Christian love is not just a feeling; it is an act of the will. The proof of our love is not in how we feel about a person but in how we act towards that person. Love prays for one another. Love hangs in there when a friend is in trouble. Love gives and gets – it's the nature of friendship to go out of your way to supply what another needs. The friends of the King must not only love the King, they must love one another. What joy it must bring to our King's heart when He sees His friends loving one another and working together to obey His commands.

What does it mean to be a friend of the King of kings? On one hand, it is a humbling experience because He chose us and we didn't choose Him. We must always remember this lest we become presumptuous and pride of our spiritual standing in Christ. There's no place for that since we had nothing to do with it.

On the other hand, friendship with Jesus is the greatest of privileges and we should keep our eyes and ears open to what He wants to show us and say to us from His Word. Eliphaz, one of Job's so-called friends asked an insulting question of him in **Job 15:8**, "Have you heard the counsel of God?"

or “Have you heard the secret of God?” Eliphaz was working under the assumption that Job had sinned and deserved all the trouble that had come his way. Job’s defense of himself was greeted with disbelief and ridicule but Eliphaz assumed too much. **Ps 25:14** tells us that “the secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.” God has no problem revealing His will to those who are prepared to submit to it and faithful to fulfill it.

Is this you? How close to you choose to be to God? If sin is holding you back, don’t despair; Jesus paid the penalty for sin when He died on the cross and shed His blood. All you need to do now is obtain the sin cleansing power of His blood and apply it to your life. Then, not only will your sin be forgiven but He will become your Master and your friend. He will be a true friend to you. Will you be a friend to Him?

“The friend is a confidant who shares the knowledge of his superior’s purpose and voluntarily adopts it as his own”

Does this accurately describe your Christian walk or have you yet to adopt His purposes as your own? 😊