Friends Together against the World

We have just sung a very familiar hymn, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” That hymn is based on the first part of our Scripture text for this morning.

**Read John 15:12-16:4**

I think it is immediately clear that the emphasis of the hymn is different from the emphasis of this passage. The hymn tells us that Jesus bears all our sins and griefs, and He shares all our sorrows. That is a wonderful Scriptural truth, but it is not what this passage is saying. In John 15, Jesus calls the apostles His friends because they obey Him. Since they are His friends, He tells them what He is doing. On that night, before He was taken away to be crucified, He told His friends what was going to happen.

We also are the friends of Jesus if we have obeyed His command to believe in Him. Our friendship with Christ deepens as we live in obedience to His other commands, especially His command to love our brothers and sisters in Christ.

*You are My friends if you do what I command you* (**John 15:14**).

Friendship with Jesus is a special kind of friendship. It is the friendship of a king with the favored members of his court. The slaves of a king only obey. The king does not favor them with his confidence. When the king raises some of his courtiers to the position of friends, he discusses his plans with them.

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

On the other hand, we are still the slaves of Christ, as He himself says.

*Remember the word that I said to you, “A slave is not greater than his master.” If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also* (**John 15:20**).

So what did Jesus mean when He said, “*No longer do I call you slaves?”* He meant that we are not just slaves. We are slaves, but we are also friends.

Let’s go back to the king and his court. Everyone in the king’s court had to obey him. In that sense, they were all his slaves. Even his friends had to obey him. So his friends did not stop obeying him when they became his friends. In fact, if they stopped obeying their king, he would no longer call them friends. He would punish them for their disobedience. The friends of a king had had special access to the king. They could bring Him their problems with a boldness other people would not dare to use, but they had to accept His answer.

Therefore, when we think of Jesus as our friend, we must not think of Him as our buddy. Buddies are equals. We are not the equals of Jesus. We tell Jesus our troubles. He does not tell us His troubles—strictly speaking, He doesn’t have any. He explains some of His actions and His plans in the Bible, but He doesn’t ask for our advice. Sometimes He may impress on our hearts a course of action we would not have dreamed up ourselves—just as a king may lean over to whisper instructions to one of his close friends. We do not instruct Him. We are not His counselors. Friendship with Jesus is a very uneven friendship. He befriends us. We do not befriend Him.

There is one other facet of friendship with Jesus that we must notice in our text for today. If a king goes to war, his friends must go with him. So also, the friends of King Jesus experience the hostility of those who hate Jesus. Jesus and His friends stand together against the world.

To summarize: If we obey Jesus Christ by believing in Him and loving our Christian brothers and sisters, then He calls us His friends as well as His slaves. Since we are friends of King Jesus, He shares His plans with us; we share our problems with Him; and we endure persecution with Him. In our text for this morning, Jesus prepares us for life together in a hostile world. What does Jesus want you, His friends, to do?

**1. PRESERVE YOUR LOVE TOGETHER IN THE WORLD**

We who belong to Jesus are not only the friends of Jesus. We are also friends of each other. When we were on vacation, I picked up a biography of George Washington. The thesis of the book is that George Washington was the indispensible man. Without George Washington, there probably would never have been a United States of America. He was a great man, though not a Christian. He was a great man, but he had flaws. Something he did not understand during his first term as president was that some of his friends hated each other and were plotting against each other. He deliberately chose for his cabinet men with differing opinions because he wanted to hear both sides of an argument, and he assumed that his friends would be as moderate and large-hearted as he was. He was wrong. Because they hated each other, some of Washington’s friends soon came to distrust him.

King Jesus insists that His friends must love each other. The commandment of Jesus to love comes into play—

**A. Especially when *you differ***

People normally like those who agree with them. The people in my astronomy club normally get along pretty well. However, in the nearly 20 years I have belonged, a few people have stomped off mad. One situation became a festering sore in the club for years.

Jesus would not have commanded us to love each other if He had known there would never be any disagreements among us. The love of Christ invading the lives of believers is what enables them to be united.

*Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. 3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others* (**Philippians 2:1-4**).

The next few verses point us to the humility of Christ who left the glory of heaven to die on a cross. His humble love is the model and motive for our love.

The commandment of Jesus to love applies—

**B. Not only in word, but *in deed***

Christians generally know they are supposed to love each other, so sometimes they become quite adept at fooling themselves about how loving they are. I hear things like this:

*I love him, but I can’t stand him.*

*I love her, but I don’t like her.*

*I love him in the Lord, but I don’t have any feelings for him anymore.*

These statements may be accompanied with angry, ugly facial expressions. *I love him, but...* may go along with obvious disgust and disdain. Christian people sometimes despise the very ones they claim to love *“in the Lord.”* That expression, *“I love him in the Lord,”* may mean, *I don’t really love him at all.*

God does not require you to trust someone who repeatedly stabs you in the back. God does not require you to have the same warm, fuzzy feelings of affection for those who hurt you as for those who help you. God does not require you to pretend that evil actions are OK. But, He does call on you and me to desire and to work for the good our brothers and sisters. We are to put the love in Christ in action.

*We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth* (**1 John 3:16-18**).

Jesus Christ died for His enemies to make them His friends. Now He has formed us into a family under God the Father; He has made us His friends, and He requires His friends to love each other if they want to continue experiencing the fullness of His friendship.

George Washington was surprised to discover that his friends hated each other. Jesus is not surprised when His friends quarrel with each other, so He gives us the Holy Spirit so that we are able to obey His command to love each other.

**2. ENDURE TOGETHER THE HATRED OF THE WORLD**

At the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Franklin said, *“We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately.”* That is certainly true of the followers of Jesus Christ. If we do not hang together in the love of Christ, the world will string us up and leave us dangling from the nearest tree because the world hates Christ and His followers. Why?

**A. Because Christ exposes their *sin***

*If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. 23 He who hates Me hates My Father also. 24 If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well. 25 But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, “THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE”* (**John 15:22-25**).

The life and teaching of Christ exposes the sin of the world. This is one of the main themes of the gospel of John. For example,

*This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God* (**John 3:19-21**).

People like to think well of themselves. Nearly everyone thinks he is better than average: *I may have some small defects, but I’m certainly not as bad as THEY are.* Christ during His life, and the gospel after His death, show us the exceeding blackness of our sin. Your sin is so bad, and my sin is so exceedingly abhorrent to God, that Jesus had to suffer the wrath of God in order to save us.

The worldling does not like to hear that his sin is a stench in the nostrils of God. The worldling does not like to be called an enemy of God. The worldling hates the message, and it hates the messenger. King Jesus calls us to endure the hatred of the world. The world hates Christ and us because Christ exposes its sin.

Linked with this is another reason for the hatred of the world. The world hates Christ and His followers—

**B. Because Christ exposes their *ignorance***

*They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. 3 These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me* (**John 16:2-3**).

The religious leaders of that day claimed to know God, but the more they insisted that they could see, the more they proved that they were blind.

*And Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.” 40 Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, “We are not blind too, are we?” 41 Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains”* (**John 9:39-41**).

People who are proud of their knowledge of God do not like to hear that they are ignorant. That was true of the Jews in Jesus’ day. It is still true. Whether they are Muslims, or Buddhists, or worshipers of trees and stones, people resent being told that their gods are no gods: *My parents, and my grandparents, and my ancestors for many generations have worshiped these gods. Are you telling me that they are all condemned to eternal death in hell? No way! I cannot desert my ancestors. I cannot desert my family and friends now.*

Even people who are not religious are proud of their supposed knowledge: *We are not duped by your old superstitions. We are modern people. We are educated people. We know better. How dare you tell us that we are guilty of ignoring God when we know that He doesn’t even exist. Stop trying push your superstitions and your out-dated morals down our throats.*

The world hates to be told that it is desperately wicked and walking in the darkness of its self-imposed ignorance, so it reacts with hatred. In 2011 Vanderbilt University changed its policy for religious organizations on campus. In the future no student organization was allowed to have any belief standards, even for student leaders. All appeals to the university fell on deaf ears. “Any belief—particularly those about the authority of Scripture or the church—could potentially constrain sexual activity or identity.” Basically, a group of atheists could show up at an InterVarsity Christian Fellowship meeting and elect one of their own as president. “14 campus religious communities—comprising about 1,400 Catholic, evangelical, and Mormon students—lost their organizational status.” Not only that, but these organizations were not allowed to set up tables at student fairs to let other students know that they were meeting nearby off campus (*Christianity Today,* September 2014, 54-58).

The friends of King Jesus need to love each other and hold each other up if we are to endure the hatred of the world.

This brings me to the third thing that Jesus wants us as His friends to do.

**3. TESTIFY TOGETHER OF CHRIST TO THE WORLD**

Christian students are still present at Vanderbilt, and still sharing Christ, but it is harder than it was a few years ago. Since they couldn’t have a table at the student fair, the InterVarsity group elected to wear T-Shirts advertising their presence. Obviously if you keep your mouth shut, and if no one knows that you belong to Christ, you won’t have to worry about the hatred of the world. The hatred of the world implies that Christ’s friends will testify of Him to the world.

*When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, 27 and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning* (**John 15:26-27**).

Our Lord expects us to testify—

**A. In *words* about Christ**

The task of the apostles was to tell the world what they had seen and heard as they followed Christ from the beginning of His ministry, up until His death, resurrection, and ascension. They were supposed to preach, and they did.

You and I must also testify to Christ with words. Some Christians say, “I will just live as a good Christian, and then when people ask why I am so nice, I will tell them it is because of Jesus.” The problem with this strategy is that people don’t ask. Most of them will just assume that you are a nice guy.

If our words are to have any effect on a hostile world, we must testify to Christ—

**B. In the *Spirit* of Christ**

The Helper, who is the Holy Spirit, adds His inward testimony to our outward words. Not only that, but when we are facing a hostile audience, He gives us what we should say.

*When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit* (**Mark 13:11**).

When the Spirit helps us to speak, we should not assume that people will automatically be saved. Acts 6 tells us that the enemies of Stephen *“were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking”* (v. 10), so what did they do? Did they repent and say, “God is with him”? No. They stoned him to death.

Here again, in this matter of testifying to Christ, it is vitally important that the friends of Christ remain friends with each other. The world looks and laughs when believers in the Prince of Peace fight each other with tooth and claw. We must fight heresy, and we must argue for sound doctrine, but the majority of church quarrels and splits are over smaller things, like the color of the carpet. Outside our own fellowship, we need to tell the world that we stand together with other churches that teach the basic doctrines of Scripture even if we disagree with those churches on other important matters.

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another* (**John 13:34-35**).

**Concluding Application**

If we are friends of each other as Jesus befriended us, if we love our brothers and sisters as Jesus loved us, then our testimony to the world will be clear and unclouded. The world may still reject Christ and us, but they will know that we belong to Him.

**CONCLUDING APPLICATION—**What does it mean for us to be friends together against the world?

**A. Friends *spend time* together**

The friends of Jesus spent time with Him. They could not have become His friends without that.

*... and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning* (**John 15:27**).

Jesus gives us a pattern for friendship. Friendship involves spending time together. Without that, we may have good intentions toward each other, but we won’t know each other.

**B. Friends *speak well* of each other**

*A perverse man spreads strife, And a slanderer separates intimate friends* (**Proverbs 16:28**)

*He who conceals a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends* (**Proverbs 17:9**)

Have you spoken about another Christian in such a way that his friends thought less of him? Have you said things—even true things—that did not need to be said to certain people, that caused them to have a lower opinion of a brother or sister in Christ. When you, by your words, cause a separation between former friends, you are a perverse man; you are a perverse woman. You are not acting as a friend to either party.

**C. Friends *stick together***

*A man of too many friends comes to ruin, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother* (**Proverbs 18:24**).

If you pursue popularity, you will come to ruin. Jesus is our best friend. He sticks closer than a brother. Our Lord intends for the church to be a company of friends who stick closer together than they do to blood relatives who do not know the Lord.

*A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity* (**Proverbs 17:17**).

**D. Friends *sweeten* their counsel**

*Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy* (**Proverbs 27:6**).

*Oil and perfume make the heart glad, So a man's counsel is sweet to his friend*(**Proverbs 27:9**).

I have known people whose words are like blasts from a shotgun. When you are wrong, they will let you know, and not gently. Their motto is, “I just tell it like it is. If they don’t like it, tough. It’s the truth.” A true friend knows how to correct a fault with words are like sweet perfume.

The stronger our friendship with each other as friends of the Lord Jesus Christ, the better we will be able to endure the hatred of the world and testify to the world about Christ.

**For Private Meditation or Family Discussion**

1. How did the Lord speak to you through the message? Did He put His finger on any habits or attitudes that you need to change? Did He encourage you regarding some difficulty, move you to undertake some new challenge, or open your heart to some truth you hadn’t seen before?

2. How have you experienced the love of your brothers and sisters in Christ? How have you expressed His love to them?

3. Have the reproaches of those who reproach Lord fallen on you (Psalm 69:9; Romans 15:1-4)? How have you born them? How have you tried to avoid them?

4. Read Philippians 4:2-3. What did instruction did Paul give regarding Euodia and Syntyche? What were these women like? What might it take for these women obey the apostle’s command?

5. What concerns do you have about sharing Christ with others? How might those concerns be relieved? What else might help to relieve them?