

Jesus' Friendship

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Psalter 240: 1-5

Psalter 123:1

John 15

Psalter 284: 1-4

Psalter 62: 1-3

Psalter 236: 1-4

Congregation, the text for today is John 15, the verses 14 and 15. *"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth, but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you."*

Jesus' friendship with three thoughts:

1. Made friends
2. Close friends
3. United friends.

Congregation, John 15 is part of the discourse of the Lord Jesus on that Thursday evening before He died. This chapter is a recording of what the Lord Jesus has said to His disciples. There are some key words in this portion. **Ten** times in this chapter we read about love, **eight** times we read about fruit, and **ten** times about the word abide, or remain, or continue. So again, ten times love, eight times fruit and ten times to abide. If you use these three words can you summarise the chapter? Let's try.

The disciples are encouraged by the Master before His death to bear fruit, to be united, to be connected to the vine and to produce fruit and more fruit. The Lord also wants to prune them so that they can bring forth fruit abundantly. The branches need to be in the vine to be able to bear fruit. It is an important issue here, also for us today. It is important for us to also bear fruit and to live a holy life, to bear fruit to God's glory. So what fruit is mentioned? Love is emphasised here? Love is the fruit. We see that time and time again in this chapter. *"I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit for without me ye can do nothing," (John 15:5) "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit," (John 15:8) "as the Father hath loved me so have I loved you, continue in my love" (John 15:9)*

So the emphasis is on bearing fruit. Especially on the fruit of loving one another. To love one another in the family, in the church, at work, and in our neighbourhood. But you would say that is not always possible – how can we be such loving persons? Are we not evil by heart? Even God's people can not love when they decide to, or when they want to. That is

why the Lord Jesus is says ten times to abide; abide in me, abide in the vine, abide in love, continue. It is about perseverance, it is about continuing on in this life.

In this chapter the Lord Jesus is speaking to his disciples on this Thursday evening before He dies, "Oh disciples, bear fruit. Oh disciples, love one another. Oh disciples, abide in me." For that reason, the Lord Jesus speaks about Himself. In verse 12 he says, *"This is my commandment, That ye love one another as I have loved you.* When we have the Lord's supper, the Lord emphasises that he loves his people and therefore they need to abide in His love, bear fruit unto Him, and continue in it. Christ is the example, when in verse 13 we read His example: *"Greater love has no man than this than that a man lay down his life for his friends."* So the Lord Jesus is telling them, "I love the Father and I love you therefore you love one another. Bear fruit, bear more fruit and abide in Me. Don't loose contact. Meditate on Me. Abide in Me, continue, remain."

Three times the word friend is used. (John 15:14) *"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."* (v13) *"greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay his life down for his friends"* and then in v 15 again *"but I have called you friends."* What is a friend? Friends have something in common. Friendship is something else other than being friendly. Two people can talk together in a very friendly way, a polite way without being friends. But to be friends you needs more; you need a bond, you need love, you need something in common, right? If we have nothing in common it is hard to be friends. For example, you have to have a common interested in music or farming, or something else in this life. You cannot be friends if you have nothing in common. You can not talk about things if you don't feel the same way. This is the same for the friendship with the Lord Jesus. There has to be something in common. When the Lord works this, then there is something that they can relate to. For example, the holiness of the Lord, or the love of the law and also many other things, but especially the love, that unconditional love. That is the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has that same love. He has a human nature that resembles His people, because His people are becoming restored into the image of God. So, there is something similar between Jesus Christ and His people. The Lord Jesus never needed a new heart, because His heart was without sin, but that new heart has something in common with the Lord Jesus. There is a closeness.

When people are friends they love one another, they help one another, they rejoice together. The Lord Jesus is a perfect friend. He never forsakes, He never betrays, He always has time. He is with God's people. He is with His friends on the road. God's people are on the narrow path to eternal life, but they are not alone on that road, they are with Him. The Lord Jesus is always with them.

Do you know something of that? Or are we friends of the world instead of friends of God and friends of Christ. What takes up your energy? What do you love? What do you spend so much time on? What do we love to spend time on? Browsing the internet? Our hobbies? What has our heart?

If we are friends with Him then it is different. *"Love not the world neither the things that are in the world, If any any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."* (1 John

2:15) So the love of God, the love of Christ can not go together with the love of the world. Therefore the Lord Jesus came so low to be a friend. *"Who is like unto the Lord our God who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth."* (Ps 113:5,6)

Friends - how do you become a friend of God? Are we automatically friends? Can we just assume it? Should I just tell you that you are ? Should I say that you are His friend? That He is your friend and you are His friend? Can we just present it as a fact? I don't dare to do that – it needs to be true. We need to have a change of heart for that. We cannot be a friend of God, we are by nature enemies, we are hostile. Isaiah 53 says that we despise Him. He is someone that we have no interest in. By nature we resist it, like Stephen says *"Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did so do ye also."* (Acts 7:51)

Oh sure, the Lord also has a goodness to people. He loved the Pharisee that was close to Him and close to the kingdom, to the Pharisee that obeyed the laws that He had set. It said that the Lord Jesus loved him, but it was not friendship. Again by nature, there is no friendship. We love the world, and we are without God in the world. But then the Lord comes and he disarms people. He takes those weapons out of our hands. He changes our hearts understanding and we begin to love the Lord. We begin to seek Him, we begin to long for that friendship that we hear about. We wonder if that friendship is also possible for us. Then we begin to seek and pray to God, " Oh be my friend. Can it possibly be for me too?"

Can the Lord be friends with us? No, not when He looks at us, not when He looks at our sins. But He can save us and change us for His names' sake. For His glory's sake. And the ones to whom He gives that faith, He gives them the power to be the children of God, to receive the status of child of God, and also the status of friend of Him. You cannot be friends with the world and friends with the Lord Jesus. It is either one or other. Both is impossible. Or do we not understand our animosity yet? There are still people among us that think highly of themselves. They say, "I go to church, I read the Bible and pray, I do my best to be friendly - and the Lord apparently doesn't want me. I am friendly toward God, but He is not friendly to me." And what do we say to that? We say that is not true. You might look friendly but you keep your heart far from Him. You don't give your heart at all to Him. You resist Him. You may think that you are willing, but that is in fact nonsense. The Lord calls everyone that hears the Word and He also makes His elect friends. That's right. By nature it is not in us. *"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is an enemy of God."* (James 4:4) *"For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."* (Romans 5:10). So we need to be made friends, and God is doing that by His Word and His Holy Spirit.

Think about Abraham as it is quoted in James 2:23, *"And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.* So what made him a friend? Did you hear it? How did Abraham become a friend of God? *"And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham **believed** God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God."* You

become a friend of God through justification and justification is by faith. That saving faith, by seeking for salvation only in Him, by trusting in Him, by relying entirely in Him, by seeking nothing beside Him.

The Lord does not find friends on the earth. There is no one seeking for Him, there is no one interested in such a friendship. But the Lord is seeking and saving a people for His sake. Becoming a friend of God is not something that we can begin ourselves. It is impossible. But it is possible with God and He continues making friends and changing hearts. *"The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."* (Romans 8:7) So see, that it is the Lord's work.

Sometime back I had been to a meeting and an unknown person asked for a ride. I said okay to him. So I gave him a ride and while we were driving in the car he told me his story. He had been in the marines. He had left home and lived a worldly life. Then his father died so he came home, it did not do much to him. He stayed with his mother for a couple of days, and his mother asked him to come along to church. He reluctantly said okay, and he went along to the reading service. The text that day was, *"The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."* (Romans 8:7) The Lord pricked in his heart. He was the enemy, and his whole life changed around. Do we know about that? Are we still good people? Are we still good Christians? We are baptised, we have some civility, but do we know what we need? We need conversion, we need love, we need a friendship, we need faith, we need repentance, otherwise the friendship of Jesus is not needed for us.

We are lovers of the world, more than lovers of God. We may need the Lord, in certain situations for example in an emergency, but we do not really **need** Him. But then the Lord comes and shows you your indifference, and hostility. You will feel deeply miserable, and you will not feel as though you are a friend. You feel alone, you feel lost. You begin to look for a solution for without God, you have no life. And what a blessing when you hear the gospel for the first time. The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ – that He offers His friendship and He also offers forgiveness of sins. Then you become as a child so happy with something that you receive. This is also sometimes experienced at the table of the Lord's supper. These know themselves as the enemy of God, but they have received the faith of Abraham and are now friends of God. And now they sit at the table and consider it to be a miracle, it seemed impossible. They had always considered it to be for others, but not for themselves.

God's children are by nature enemies, but they don't remain enemies. They change quite dramatically. God's people become afraid of sin, because they are afraid of grieving the Lord. This is because their carnal mind is changed. They still have their old nature, but they have changed. *"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."* (Rom 5:6) *"but God commendeth His love towards us, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* (Rom 5:8) So see, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us! What a change this is! So real!

In John 15 vs 14 *“ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you”*. How do we explain this? The word *if* – at first glance it sounds like you have to obey Him, to do His commandment and then you become His friend and then He loves you. But this is not the case. Ye are my friends if ye show what I have worked before in your heart. So, it is not that the obedience triggers salvation, but salvation implies that his friends hate sin, it implies that they are following the Lord.

Friends, this brings us to the second thought – Close Friends.

Do you know Psalm 35? About the secrets of Jehovah? As we read in *Psalm 25:14*, *“the secret of the LORD is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.”* What does this secret mean? The secret of the Lord? One meaning says that it is the wise counsel. It can also be translated with friends or friendships. The secret of the Lord, the friendship with the Lord is with them that fear Him. With them that fear Him, with them that have a new heart, and walk the narrow pathway. The secret of the Lord is with them.

What is this secret? It is the closeness to Him. Because by nature we do not understand it, but the secret is that we begin to understand. Look at John 15v 15, *“henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what the lord doeth, but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of the Father I have made known unto you.”* I have no secrets from you, I have been open with you. I have not hidden anything from you. *“thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes,”* (Matt 11:25). Because they are the friends. Friends are open. They have no secrets, do they? If you have a real good friend you might say, “he knows everything”, or “she knows everything”, they might know even more than family members. Close friendship is being transparent, being open and telling each other the truth, not holding things back. So that’s what it is – *“but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father have I made known unto you.”* (John 15:15). So the Lord, through the Bible, and through the Holy Spirit reveals the mystery of the gospel. That is something that the natural man does not understand. He cannot understand it. It goes over His head. It doesn’t do much to him. When the Holy Spirit comes and reveals things from the Bible, then you begin to taste, to experience, to sorrow, to rejoice, it does something to your heart. That is the Lord’s work. The Lord has no secrets. *“The secret of the LORD is with them that fear Him”* (Psalm 25:14) The Lord is wise in that sense.

In the Old Testament the prophets were also taught by the Lord. *Amos 3:7* *“surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secrets unto His servants the prophets.”* So, the servants of prophets in the Old Testament were taught by the Lord and they understood His secrets because God revealed them. In the New Testament the Lord reveals things to all His children. To all His children. He reveals those deep things of God. They taste the bitterness of sin, so that they long for the Lord. This is a new time, the time of the New Testament and the Lord enlightens their understanding, opens their Bible and gives them personal knowledge of it. And they begin to understand. They receive a feel for things, they begin to understand the life of God. This means that their salvation is not cold hearted, it is not just head knowledge, it is applied by the Holy Spirit to their heart.

The word of God, the Bible, is a closed Book by nature. A closed understanding, closed heart and a closed book. In order to become friends, the Lord lifts up the lid from their heart and reveals things, and they begin to understand. It gives such a closeness to the Lord, right?

How do close friends feel when they communicate well? When it is real friendship? It is beautiful. When the Lord sees His friends, He opens his heart for them. That is why it is so important that God's people remain in Him, and keep reading the Bible, and keep meditating on it, so that the friendship does not disappear. Abide in Him, continue in Him, remain in Him, do not leave Him. The Lord makes this known.

Friends also try to prevent conflict, right? If you have a good friend, and there is something that he hates with a passion, you are cautious, you don't do that, you don't go there. You may negotiate then, because we don't want to hurt each other. And, so it is also with the Lord. When the Lord works friendship within the heart of the sinner, then that sinner does not want to grieve the Lord. There is so much respect, so much love and so much loyalty that they don't want to hurt him? That's why we read in John 15 vs 14 that we are His friends if we do whatsoever He commands. There is a desire to live a holy life. Think of *Proverbs 18:24 "a man that hath friends must show himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."* Closer than a brother and showing himself friendly. Friendship is something you treat carefully, you don't waste it, and you don't want to harm it. *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments and His commandments are not grievous. (1 John 5:3)"*

So, the Lord Jesus is talking to his disciples on this Thursday evening just before He died – love one another, abide in Me, bear fruit, and communicate with Me, and keep communicating. I won't let you go and don't you let me go. There is still that closeness, I want to seek you and I want to hold onto you. At the Lord's supper table, the Lord is telling His people that they are not strangers of His grace. He is telling them to abide in Him, to speak to Him, to listen to Him, to meditate on Him and to live a holy life for the His sake, and for His glory. Jesus wants us to be made friends. To be close friends, and also united friends.

First we sing, Psalter 62

Congregation, we read in Exodus 33 something about Moses. What was Moses like? What was his relationship with the Lord? Did he also experience a time of friendship? Here it is, *Ex 33:11 "And the Lord spoke unto Moses face to face, as the man speaketh unto his friend."* Not only Abraham was called the friend of God, Moses spoke face to face as a man speaketh unto his friends. The tabernacle was called the face of God. The tabernacle was called the countenance of the Lord, His face. So, when David or someone else was going to the tabernacle they were going to seek God's face. Seeking God's face was going to the tabernacle. God revealed His face there in the sacrifices. We also should seek God's face, in prayer. We should not only pray a list of things that we would like to have, but in prayer we should also adore Him, have a look and behold, being quiet and say nothing, just quiet and beholding the beauty of the Lord. Psalm 27 verse 4 – *"one thing I have desired of the Lord, that I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life."* Not only on Sunday, but every day, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.

That is something that also can be experienced at the Lord's supper table; that inquiring in His temple, that beholding the beauty of the Lord, the beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do we seek His face? Or do we only ask questions? Do we want to meet with Him? I know we cannot do it ourselves. God's children cannot do it themselves either, but they may also slowly read the Bible, word after word, and ask the Lord for an opening to see the beauty of the Lord, to see the beauty of His birth, of His obedience, of His suffering, of His preaching, of His miracles, of His wisdom, of His offices, of His names, of His natures, of His person. There is so much to inquire, so much to seek, so much to behold if we only want to be face to face, like Moses spoke face to face to God as a friend.

You know that cows have several stomachs, right? They are ruminant mammals; they chew the cud. Well, that is an expression used in knowing the truth. Chewing on it, digesting it, to bring it into another stomach and go over it again. So, the Lord wants friendship with His people. He wants them to think about Him, to meditate on Him, and to see Him. And when He looks at them, sometimes there is a wonderful connection and wonderful closeness. This may not be every day or every week, but the Lord does give this. And of course, the Lord's supper can also be used for that. To sit at the table and to eat the bread and to lift up the heart to heaven, where Christ is. Not, focussing on the natural bread, but to look upon Him. That is a piece of heaven, to be more dependent on Him. It is good to be so close to God.

The apostle Paul wrote about it as well, he said that he wanted to depart to be with Christ. He had seen His face, and he wanted to see His face again. Do we know about that? The apostle Paul also wrote that *"His grace is sufficient unto me."* How sufficient when the Lord looks face to face, that communion, and that beholding of the beauty. If you have never had that, to behold the beauty of Jesus, then I am afraid that you know nothing about it, that you have no grace in your heart. That you are friendly to God, but have no friendship in your heart, it is just outward.

Mark 4:11 "And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God, but unto them that are without, all things are done in parables." Jesus spoke in parables to hide, not only to reveal.

Christ is united with his people through the same vine. They are the branches. And He is encouraging them to hold onto Him. What does God's Word say about how God's people abide in Him. What does it say about abiding in Christ? We see that phrase ten times here: abide in Him. How do we abide in Him? The answer is that in order to abide in Christ we must believe in Him steadfastly. So, we need to hold on to him, hold onto the Lord Jesus Christ in faith. The Lord is encouraging His people to believe in Him. Abide in Him, means to believe in Him, by justification in faith. *"Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the alter? ... Abraham believed God, And he was called the friend of God."* (James 2;21-23)

The Holy Spirit makes all things new for His people, because there is this command to abide in Him also, to grow up in Him, to depend more on Him, to have a deeper knowledge of Him. The Holy Spirit can make all things new. Things that you have experienced in the past may feel cold now, and they may not speak to your heart anymore. But depend on Him, and ask

the Lord that you may see His face again, that He will touch your heart again, that the Holy Spirit will testify with your spirit again. Believing is not something that is a decision of your head, it is a heart thing. The Lord describes it as a friendship. Do you have a soulmate on earth? Is your husband or wife your soulmate? That's fantastic. But maybe you don't have a soulmate, may Christ be that for you. May He be the One that you tell everything to. Not only about salvation, mainly that, but not only. All your cares and all your concerns – lay it at His feet, and in His hands and depend on Him, and seek salvation in Him,

Col 3 v2 *“set your affection,”* set you affection – how can you do that? By meditating – so *“set your affection on things above, not on things of the earth.”* Col 2: 6 – *“as ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him.”* Walk ye in Him. Walk with him and walk in Him. Rooted and built up in Him, established in the faith as ye have been taught, abounding with thanksgiving. What a blessing, what a joy when the Lord gives that, when the Lord pulls His children close to him. Then He gives them a confirmation, that they are His. Friends of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thursday evening, the Lord Jesus knew that the next day He would be crucified, but He wanted to tell the disciples before that, and once more to emphasise that they have to bear fruit, and more fruit. So He instructed: abide in Me, abide in the vine, abide in Me constantly, be friends, seek my face. So the Lord is glorified, so God's people receive joy.

That joy of God's people is not one sided, there is joy from both sides, right? When there is a wedding here, and the bride is coming up the aisle and the groom is standing at the front. Is only one of them happy? or both? Both are happy, so friends are both happy in a friendship. Like the bridegroom rejoices in the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee. There is the Lord Jesus rejoicing in the friendship. He is longing to sit with them at the table. He is not only making them happy, but He is making Himself happy. Christ makes Himself happy with His people, with His friends. He likes this togetherness. It is only partial on earth, but it will be perfect in heaven.

AMEN