

Front Page - 2016 06

Portrait Of Christ In Relation To His Friendship

Readings

Proverbs 18:24
Song of Solomon 5:16
Luke 7:34
John 15:13

We live in a world of associates, colleagues, acquaintances, and allies, but very few true friends. True friends are the ones who are there not just in the bright days but in the darkest loneliness days of life. Many of us have had the experience of disappointment when those whom we thought were friends were otherwise when the storm clouds gathered. There is a statement, "A friend in need is a friend indeed", and it can be taken in two ways. When you are in need and the individual sits and cries with you that is a friend indeed, on the other hand, there are those who when in need profess friendship to receive something from the individual.

The Psalmist and the Lord knew the darkness of being bereft of family and friends. When our Lord was here not one of His brethren believed in Him (Jn. 7:5). Judas betrayed him for a paltry thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 26:15), and when the motley throng came to Gethsemane to take Him, all the disciples, "forsook Him, and fled" (Matt. 26:56). He could have recounted the experiences of Old Testament saints and said:

- a) "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me" (Psa. 41:9)
- b) How plaintive are the words: "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness" (Psa. 88:18).
- c) Again, "I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top" (Psa. 102:6, 7).

The greatest friend a man could have while he walks this scene of time (Song of Sol. 5:16) was left friendless and bereft of the dearest to His heart. Why? It was part of His training to be our Great High Priest so that when we walk that lonely pathway, we are not alone, for He is with us all the way. How beautiful are the words of the hymn of long ago:

Can it be true the things they say of you?
You walked this earth, sharing with friends you knew
All that they had, the work, the joy, the pain
That we might find the way to heaven again.

Can it be true, the things they did to you?
The death, the shame, and were your friends untrue?
Yet you returned again alive and free,
Can it be true, my Lord, it had to be.

However, there was another fellowship which was closer than that of any human relationship. It was His fellowship with God. But there came a time when, while that fellowship was never broken or strained, yet He knew what it was to be forsaken by God. This was no act of cold indifference by God to the sufferings of His perfect Servant, but the activity of immeasurable love for humanity. I have one son, I love him dearly, and I would never ever let him suffer and die for another individual, much less an individual who could not care less for His sorrows and aloneness. How great then is God's love for us, the ungrateful and uninterested, that He should forsake His Son and deliberately punish Him for our sins? Dark beyond words was that experience when after three hours of darkness, in multiple levels He cried: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). Well might the hymn-writer pen the words:

"On such love, my soul, still ponder,
Love, so great, so rich, so free;
Say, while lost in holy wonder,
Why, O Lord, such love to me?"

Front Page - 2016 06

Portrait Of Christ In Relation To His Friendship

The answer is so beautiful and awesome. The Lord suffered unspeakable sufferings because He wants me to be His friend. The Lord Himself said: "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (Jn. 15:14). What is it He commands us to do?

- a) We are to believe on Him, depending on God for salvation through the finished work of Christ at Calvary. How wonderfully comforting are His words: "*And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life*" (Jn. 6:40). It does not say believe about Him, but believe on Him, that is, putting one's full dependance for salvation and Heaven all on Christ.

Since Christ has paid such a cost to be a Friend to me, how can I not be a friend to Him? He has told us how we can be His friend, that being, by keeping His commandments. The question is, "What are His commandments?"

- a) When preaching the gospel and individuals get saved, it is the speaker's responsibility to let the individual know they are now disciples and exhort them to be disciples. But, what is a "disciple"? It is one of a company adhering to a teaching of a spiritual leader. The scriptures inform us of John's disciples. They were those who adhered to His teaching concerning the Lord. As disciples, every believer is part of a doctrinal movement, of adherence to the commands of the Lord.
- b) Another command is for those who have accepted the Lord as Savior be baptized. Biblical baptism is not being sprinkled by water as a little baby, it is the decision of an individual who has fulfilled the words of Philip to the eunuch. When the eunuch asked Philip: "What doth hinder me to be baptized?" Philip answered: "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." The man confessed: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God". Then note the words of scripture, "they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water (Acts 8:36-39). Baptism is full immersion, that is His command. Of course one can be His friend and not get baptized, but the friendship and fellowship will not be as deep as it could be. Baptism is not just a ritual, it necessitates a way of life. As Paul writes to the Romans, it is "to walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4), which means to live life showing the characteristics of the Lord.
- c) Another command is: "Remember me". On the night of His betrayal and on the evening before his crucifixion, the Lord gathered with His disciples and instituted that which is commonly known as the Lord's supper. Taking a loaf of bread in His hand, He broke it, and said: "This is my body, which is broken for you" (1 Cor. 11:24). Then He took the cup of wine, and said: "This cup is the new testament in my blood" (1 Cor. 11:25). In 1 Corinthians 11 we are told very distinctly he also said: "In remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24, 25).

An illustration: Imagine me standing by the bedside of my father as he died, and taking off his watch he hands it to me and says, "Son, take this, and never forget me". How precious that symbol of his love would be to me, and as long as time lasted, every time I would look at that watch I would remember him.

I count it a privilege, and an honor, to be able on the first day of the week to meet with other believers and remember the Lord in the breaking of the bread and drinking of the cup, but this also commands a certain lifestyle. Can I be His friend and not remember Him? The answer is "yes", but if I do these things, how much deeper that friendship can be.

- d) There is another commandment which He gave, and it was: "That ye love one another; as I have loved you" (Jn. 13:34; 15:12, 17). One of the great tragedies I see amongst nominal christians (even amongst those who have been saved for many years) and professing church leaders, is the reality that they know little of love. We can speak about it, sing about it, preach it, and teach it, we can read 1 Cor. 13 and expound it, and yet know so little about it. How cruel so-called Christians can be to each other. The Holy Spirit bears witness to the reality, even amongst believers, they can bite and devour one another (Gal.

Front Page - 2016 06
Portrait Of Christ In Relation To His Friendship

5:15), that is, they can be like dogs, for dogs bite, and they can like lions, for lions devour. The result of doglike behavior of one saint to another is hurt and pain. The result of lion like behavior is to make it as if the Christian never existed. I ask the question, "where's the love?" Recently I was asked if I would speak to the administrators of a local church and if the family could have the funeral from the church. The man and his wife had been members of that congregation for many years, but because of his moving to another part of the country without telling them, they were angry for he had not submitted to their authority. The family waited for three days for a response and none came, so other arrangements had to be made. What was ironic is that at that same time they were studying 1 John, and the passage under consideration said: "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 Jn. 3:18), and yet they wouldn't help the family in their hour of deepest need. I have to ask, "Where was the love?" How can these men say they are in fellowship with God and friends of God? It is a question I have no answer for.

May God help us to live in such a way that we, like Abraham, may be called the "Friend of God" (Jam. 2:23).

. . . . Rowan Jennings