

John Ch15v12-17 - You Are My Friends

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[0:00] John 15 this morning, so if you could open up your Bibles and turn to the Gospel of John and chapter 15. There are some notes available, there might be still some at the back.

Originally, I was going to preach one sermon from verse 9 to verse 17 of chapter 15. Last week, I only did three verses, so this really is a continuation of the same section, and in some ways is a part two to the sermon of last week.

There were just too many good things in these verses to look at. So I'm going to read the sections, we're going to read John chapter 15, 9 to 17, and we're going to focus on verses 12 to 17 this morning.

John 15, verse 9, As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.

I've told you this so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. My command is this, love each other as I have loved you.

[1:42] Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command.

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. You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit. Fruit that will last.

And so that whatever you ask, in my name, the Father will give you. This is my command. Love each other. Let's pray.

Father, we have your good word in front of us. It is a joy simply to read it, and to hear what you would say directly, by your Spirit, through the Scriptures to us.

[2:45] And we also thank you, Lord, that we can hear the Scriptures explained, and we pray, Lord, by your Spirit, that we would listen and hear what you would say to us this morning, through the preaching of your word.

Most assuredly, that's for our good, and we know it is for your glory. Amen. Well, if you were here with us last week, we looked at verses 9 to 11.

And if you weren't, a very, very brief recap. Three things. Everything, verse 11, begins from the love of God the Father and Jesus.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. That's number one. Two, Jesus' life shows us that love and obedience go hand in hand.

They go together. Three, verse 11, I have told you this, so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

[3:53] We can be as happy as Jesus. So there are the three things from last week. It begins with the Father. However, Jesus' life shows us that love and obedience don't need to be separated, and that we can have the joy or the happiness of Jesus in our lives.

As I said, verse 11 is where we left it. Jesus' joy from the love that he has with the Father and from his obedience can be in us.

As we love and as we obey Jesus, we experience the same joy that Jesus experiences. But now here's the rub, and I hope you left last week kind of thinking about this.

Jesus is perfect in both his love and his obedience. Jesus is perfect. So how can an imperfect Christian, that's you and me, hold love and obedience together?

How can we do it? Jesus is perfect. He can do it. How can we do it? And then how can we experience the joy of Jesus? Because he's able to do it, but we're not perfect.

[5:12] Our reality is that we battle sin. We have weaknesses, and we have struggles, and we face temptation.

We are finite beings with failing bodies, living in a fallen world, a world that is opposed to God and is under the influence and direction of Satan.

We know hurt, and we know disappointment from others. How can we keep love and obedience together with all of this when we see how Jesus does it perfectly?

Obedience of our Lord is not easy. What help is there for putting love and obedience into practice? Well, verses 12 to 17 are there to help us see that we can share in the joy of Jesus by loving the friends of Jesus with the love that Jesus shows us.

[6:22] That's the big idea this morning through these verses. We share in the joy of Jesus by loving the friends of Jesus with the love that Jesus has shown us.

We're going to go through these verses this morning to see that. Verse 12. My command is this. Love each other as I have loved you.

Love and obey. Jesus spells out that organic connection for us again in verse 12. My command is this. Love each other. My command is this.

Love each other as I have loved you. The command itself is to love. Verse 17. In case you missed it the first time, this is my command.

Verse 17. Love each other. We love Jesus when we obey Jesus. And the command of Jesus that we are to obey is the command to love.

[7:31] Obedience is from love to love. It's circular. The source is love. The command is to love. Back and forth. Back and forth. Back and forth.

Remember Jesus in his own life. He doesn't separate love on one side of the equation and on the very, very, very far side kind of over there is obedience.

He doesn't do that. So for us, to love Jesus is to obey Jesus. To obey Jesus is to love Jesus and to love others.

Verse 12. Love each other. Who are the each other? Well, first and foremost, it's the people in your church.

And I say in the church because the context here is Jesus talking to his disciples, his followers. These are commands from Jesus to believers to love each other, fellow believers and followers of Jesus.

[8:42] Of course, we are all in one sense to love all people without distinction. In another sense, we are to love all believers, those who are in the faith, whether they're in this church or not, but to say that we love people or that we love Christians generically and then ignore or walk over the people and the Christians that God has put in our path day to day, those who are in close proximity, those who Jesus says are our neighbors because they are near us.

Well, to say we love people and to love Christians and to do that is just hypocrisy. No, we are to see each other first as our neighbors, the people near us, fellow believers, the people in this church.

Our words, our covenant commitment to each other in the church as members is seen in our actions towards each brother and each sister, the ones we see each week in our church.

Verse 13. Here in verse 13 is the love for one another in the church that Jesus commands. And it's a do as I do type of love.

Let's read verse 13. Greater love has no one than this to lay down one's life for one's friends.

What's the extent of this command to love each other?

[10:26] The extent of the command to love is based on the love of Jesus to us. That's what Jesus is referring to and talking about in this verse.

And notice that the love of Jesus is not simply words or a simple bless you brother. The love of Jesus towards us is a heart.

Jesus' heart that is moved to self-sacrificing action. Love must be from the heart, must involve the affections, and it must be expressed through action.

because affection without action is mere sentiment. We can talk a good love, but the love of Jesus, verse 13, the love of Jesus is heart, it is words, and it is deeds.

Of course, actions without heart, if we were to do actions without love, without the affections, without the care, without the heart, well, that's a meaningless noise, Paul says in 1 Corinthians.

[11:42] But love without actions is a kind of pharisaical hypocrisy. The heart, the love, and the actions of obedience and care and love, they go together.

Actions properly express love. love. And Jesus' love for us is this, verse 13, that he lays down his life for us.

Jesus' love for us is this, it is dying on a cross for his friends, even as those friends, the people he was speaking to right now, were scattering and running and denying and hiding from him.

I want to share three things from these verses from 12 and 13 that we can see about love.

First, love is demonstrated. Love is demonstrated. Love is enacted. Jesus came not with ideas and vague niceties, but he came and he suffered and he died on the cross in the place of you and me.

[12 : 59] And if you are here this morning and you do not know the joy of the love of Jesus in your life, then see verse 13, see his love for you at the cross, the place where he died so that your sin could be forgiven if this day you would believe in him and confess him and confess your sins, then you will be forgiven and counted this very day as a friend of Jesus.

Love is demonstrated most clearly at the cross. Two, love is self-sacrificing. It puts the needs of others before your own.

That is love. Love displaces our own comforts. And it spends our resources. It pushes comfort aside.

It takes what we have, our time, our energy and our money, and it spends those things on caring for our friends. Love is a laying down of your lunchtimes or your evenings to catch up and encourage someone in their faith.

Love, it's coming here on a Sunday and setting aside your preferences for the start time and the songs we sing, good choices Connor by the way, so that we can all meet and we can all gather and do things together.

[14 : 31] It means setting aside some of our preferences because maybe we want to meet at a different time or we prefer other songs. Love is using less money on yourself so that what you give to the church allows us to gather and minister and reach out with the gospel.

Love is giving less priority to hobbies or gardening or exercising or streaming TV shows in order that for once a month that you would gather with your brothers and sisters to pray as a church.

Love is self-sacrificing. Three, love is measured in comparison to Jesus. It is the greatest love that Jesus has and he says it's to yield our life for our friends.

That's the measure of the love that Jesus has and that he shares with us. And so in our last breath maybe we'll be serving another.

We simply cannot be known then. If that's the limit of love, if that's the extent of love, it's measured by what Jesus has shown us, then we can't be known as people that are tight fisted.

[15 : 53] We can't be a shrug the shoulders type. We can't be a turn a blind eye to the needs of other people. If our friends ask for help, we should be there.

I know this is hard, demanding. It is a high standard. I just want to say this is not a call to sinless perfection.

One Christian author helpfully writes, none of us is perfect, none of us complete, none of us without weakness and sin. Though we may have grown in humility, we still at times take advantage of people we are meant to lead with love.

Though we may display the blessed virtue of gentleness, we still at times succumb to outbursts of anger. God, and God alone, perfectly exemplifies every virtue in its fullest forms.

But one of the blessings of membership in a local church is joining together through our baptism, through the Lord's table, to recognize, to see one another as friends of Jesus.

[17 : 07] Members of a local church, Christians, you have a job, and that is to recognize and to keep one another as friends of Jesus.

That's job number one in this church, is to recognize those who are friends of Jesus and help keep one another in the faith. And this, brothers and sisters, is our public and our private duty of care to one another and not mere sentiment.

To help us understand this, I want us to turn to 1 John chapter 3. 1 John chapter 3, so if you could turn in your Bibles, please, to 1 John chapter 3. It's page 1226.

We're going to be looking at verse 16. The apostle John, he wrote the gospel of John, and he also authored a number of letters. And so he wrote, he recorded the words of Jesus for us, and those words have an enormous effect on John in his life.

And later he writes to a church, and I believe he's more than likely picking up the words of Jesus that he wrote in chapter 15, of that self-sacrificing love poured into Christians, into their duties and

their lives.

[18:27] And John makes it incredibly practical for us, and I think this is the best commentary on John 15, is John himself explaining these verses.

So John, 1 John 3, chapter 3, verses 16 to 18. This is how we know what love is.

Jesus Christ laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions, and sees a brother or sister in need, but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

Dear children, let us not love with words or speech, but with actions and in truth. We are wonderfully blessed by a church family.

We lift our eyes to our Savior, who laid down his life on the cross for us. And so we ought to lay down our lives, to lay down our comforts, to lay down our possessions of time and energy and money, which we all have in some measure for our brothers and sisters.

[19:48] John makes it clear in 1 John 3, let us never claim to love Jesus, and then neglect truth and action.

if you see your brother or sister in need, or you are asked for help, do not turn the blind eye or shrug the shoulders, but know that God has gifted each of us for acts of service in his kingdom.

Back to the Gospel of John in chapter 15, verse 14. You are my friends if you do what I command. Jesus calls his disciples in verse 14 his friends. You are my friends. You are my friends. And we sung about it, and it is so true.

What a comfort to be called a friend of Jesus, to be called a friend of the living God, to be his friend and not his enemy. But now we need to deal with what I describe as a troubling if.

[21:05] The call you are my friends is linked to do what I command by an if. You are my friends if you do what I command.

And we can naturally read verse 14 like this. If you obey, then you can be my friend. If you obey, then you can be my friend.

And we can read like, obedience first, friendship is second. And we can start to think and to act. We can do this.

Like, the ground of our friendship, the basis of our friendship with Jesus is our obedience. Because we read something like this, or we pick up verse 14 in isolation and we say, okay, command obedience.

If that's right, then I can be a friend of Jesus. Then I am a friend of Jesus. Now, I hope that such a conclusion or such a sense of verse 14 doesn't feel right.

[22:08] In fact, I hope it feels wrong. That's not how we should think and read verse 14 in context, in the context of John, in the context of all of Scripture.

If you've been to this church or you go to a like-minded gospel church, then you should know that it is anti-gospel and anti-Jesus to say obedience is the grounds for knowing Jesus.

Obedience is not the grounds for knowing Jesus. Obedience is not the grounds for friendship with Jesus. That's not how this if is working. For we know from the Scriptures that the ground is this, that Jesus Christ freely gave himself for us and it is by grace that we have been saved, not by our obedience.

It is only through faith in the work that Jesus has done that we are his friends. Many of us are familiar with Ephesians chapter 2 verses 8 to 10 and this is what it says, for it is by grace you have been saved through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, not by obedience, not by the law so that no one can boast.

For we are God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do. But our salvation, the grounding of our salvation is that it is in Jesus Christ alone.

[23:45] It is grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, always and forever. Amen. Or we would be undone.

If our friendship with Jesus was based on our obedience, we'd have no chance. But we must also not discard obedience as of little or of no importance.

We must not discard obedience and so cheapen the very grace that Christ has shown us. We confess Jesus as both Savior and Lord and we love him and we obey him.

Remember, they go together. Those attempts to separate them out and push them apart and say it's all by what you do, you gotta do, you gotta do, you gotta do. It's only about faith and it doesn't

matter how you live.

Once saved, always saved. You put your hand up one time and it doesn't matter, you don't have to repent, you don't have to follow Jesus. Be so wary of those extremes that push love and obedience of Jesus apart.

[25:02] How then are we best to understand verse 14? It still seems brutally kind of hard. The if, you are my friends, if you do what I command. Well, I think it's helpful not to isolate the verse, but to look at it in the wider context.

We look in the wider context of the scriptures and what it means to be a Christian, but I think it's helpful. I'm just going to put it up there and read these verses out. These are other verses just in the context of John and in these immediate chapters that say similar things.

And so I think we want to take all of these together. chapter 14 and verse 15. I'm just going to read these out. If you love me, you will obey what I command.

If you love me, you will obey. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.

He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. The verse we're looking at, if you keep my commands, or sorry, the verse before it, verse 10, if you keep my commands, you will remain in my love.

[26:10] And the verse we're looking at, you are my friends if you do what I command. And I would say if you take those verses together and understand the wider sense of scripture and what we know to be true about the basis of our friendship with Jesus, obedience points towards love and friendship.

our obedience is a pointer towards the reality of our friendship with Jesus. It's not that obedience causes friendship. Love comes first.

Love comes first. The love of Jesus for you always, always, always comes first. Verse 14, Jesus saying that if you see somebody doing what I command, that is a visible sign that they are my friend.

That's really what verse 14 is saying. Like Jesus explained in chapter 14, one of the verses we looked at, if anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.

Verses 15 and 16, 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.

[27:29] You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, and so that whatever you ask in my name, the father will give you.

Jesus gives us many encouragements here. Again, I just want to call out three this morning.

Encouragements as to what it means to be a friend and not a servant.

To be a friend and not a servant. Encouragements that will help us in our obedience of him and our service to others. First, we are in the family and we know the family business and the family business is to bear fruit.

Verse 15, 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 have learned from my father, I have made known to you.

God could demand that we simply obey like a servant. Think of the supreme commander of an army, tasked with the grand plan and ambition to defeat the enemy.

[28:47] will that commander, the supreme commander, can come to a soldier on the battlefield and say, go and take that hill.

And a soldier, they just have to follow orders, no ifs or buts or why that hill or can you send Johnny or Joey or Mikey over the back there, I'm not really keen on that hill.

No, the general orders, the soldier obeys, the hill is stormed. That's one way to do command and obey, isn't it?

It's not, it's not how Jesus treats us. Jesus shares everything with us, all that is needed for life and godliness and obeying the father.

He shares with us we're part of the family. We have refrigerator rights. We can walk into the house and take food. We're not a servant.

[29:44] We're not a low-ranked soldier. We're more like trusted confidants. We're more like generals in his army. We know the mission. We know what he calls us to.

We know why he has shown us the depths of his love for us in dying on the cross. How will he not show us everything we need in this life to follow him? We know the mission.

The mission to be fruit-bearing friends of Jesus. Second, we are chosen by Jesus to bear fruit.

Verse 16, you did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

If we need confirmation in these verses that salvation is not by works, then we have it here. We did not choose Jesus.

[30 : 40] He chose us. We didn't decide one day, I'm going to really obey Jesus and he'll have to be my friend. It's not how it works. Jesus chose you and appointed you for love and obedience.

It's not by works. In the plans of the Father and the Son in eternity past, before a single atom came into being and spun, Jesus chose you, Jesus appointed you, that you would go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, last into eternity.

This is the family business. This is why you are sons and daughters of God the Father. This is why you are brothers and sisters with Jesus. That's why we are brothers and sisters in this church, because we're in the family business and it all originates in the love of the Father to the Son and the plan of the Father through the Son to rescue and appoint a people that would be fruitful.

Why? Because Jesus is fruitful. Jesus is fruitful. Those that image Jesus, those that are going to be like Jesus will be fruitful. A people for Jesus that are fruitful in their lives of love for each other, just like Jesus loved.

Fruitful in fulfilling the great command of Jesus on earth. In Matthew 28, Matthew 28, Jesus says to go, make disciples, baptize them.

[32 : 10] What's the final thing? Teach them everything that I've commanded. Jesus chose us and appointed us to his plan.

Isn't that great? Would you not? You've been let in. Follow the plan? Obey our Lord? Third and finally, know that we are not left on our own.

We are not left on our own in our obedience and following of Jesus. Know that whatever we ask in the name of the Father, whatever we ask so that we can be a fruit-bearing disciple of Jesus, everything we ask that would help us to love others, the Father will give to you.

he will give you what is needed for obedience. Scripture, it just says it all the time.

Here are some verses. His divine power has given us everything we need for godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

[33 : 19] That's 2 Peter. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to you.

That's the book of James, which we read from earlier. Jesus himself said in Matthew 9, ask the Lord of the harvest, ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.

Will he not give us all that is needed for his good purposes in this world if we would ask him? God the Father will equip us for obedience, for loving others as we ask.

He knows the future, we do not. He knows what we need. Let us ask him for what we need in his name so that we would be fruitful individually and as a church in our love and our obedience of him.

I just have one final application this morning. It's a hard one and I realize it can be a very personal one for many people here but what if I or someone I know really I mean really struggles to obey.

[34 : 34] They seem to be on the path with Jesus then off the path and then back on the path again and it seems to be that sin dominates yet Christ sometimes shines through.

I don't know if you have people in mind or maybe that even describes your own struggle in some way. If to be a friend of Jesus means to obey then what about when the obedience is so hard and the battle is so great that we can no longer know for certain if that person is a believer.

Well I just want to share a story. It's part of a recent blog post by a pastor called Zach Melgren. If you're interested in a link to the blog post you can ask me afterwards and read the full story.

Now in sharing this I'm going to say there are no easy answers here. This is not the pat answer. There are ups and downs of someone's struggles.

Those are unique. Where there's an ambiguous faith we simply struggle. But I hope in this sharing that you find encouragement to pray. You find encouragement to walk with people in their struggles.

[35 : 55] And ultimately to rest in Jesus' judgment in knowing that he knows who are his friends. That he knows those that he has chosen.

Because we don't have perfect knowledge. He does. And he will judge. But it's a real struggle isn't it? Obedience. When it's not there or it's just really hard.

Here's the story. For over 15 years my brother Jake battled a fierce addiction. It was a heartbreaking roller coaster of recovery and relapse. There were seasons where he seemed deeply connected to the Lord and other painful years where his addiction pulled him entirely away from the church and from Christ.

Yet in the year before he died we saw glimpses of a shift as he began attending a gospel preaching church again. When Jake passed we were left facing what I call ambiguous faith.

Losing a loved one with unclear faith leaves us wrestling and agonizing uncertainty. Caught between this profound doubt and this desperate hope we ask ourselves where did they truly stand with God.

[37 : 14] To find peace in that uncertainty we have to look at what it actually means to follow Jesus. To find peace in that uncertainty we have to look at what it actually means to follow Jesus.

Ultimately it means moving in his direction. Ultimately it means moving in his direction. Let's add some texture to the parable of the prodigal son.

It's a story I think we're all probably familiar with from the scriptures. Imagine the son trudging home after squandering his inheritance and as he walks back towards the father the doubt creeps in. There's no way my father will take me back he thinks. Fearful he turns around and he walks a quarter of a mile back towards his old life.

But then a memory of his father's compassion floods his mind and he shakes off the fear. He turns around again and continues forward home. Imagine this happens several times on his long journey.

[38 : 21] A quarter mile back a half a mile forward. A quarter a mile back a half a mile forward. His heart wages war within him. But looking at the entirety of his journey where is he headed?

he is headed home. What if that prodigal son encounters a deadly snake and dies during one of those backward diversions?

The truth remains. He was still headed home. He is still his father's son. If your loved one belonged to Christ, a season of rebellion did not unsave their soul.

Just as their own faithfulness did not save it. That identity was purchased by the blood of Jesus. They were simply a child of God fighting their battles and making their way home.

Friends, Jesus has shown us his love and the love of the father which is his joy. His joy he has shown us.

[39 : 31] He has given us his good commands to love one another, especially in this church. His love and his commands are his great joy to us as we serve him here, as we make our way home together.

Is that easy? Clearly not. Is it costly? Every day is it worth it? A thousand times over. Will we know joy?

Well, that's the promise of Jesus who gave up everything. He gave up the very heights of heaven for us and he laid his body in a grave for us and still knew the joy and the love of the father through it all.

Follow the love and obedience of Jesus closely and you will gain his joy, the joy that comes from loving his friends with the same love, the same love that he has shown us.

Let's pray. Jesus says, my command is this, love each other as I have loved you.

[40 : 51] Greater love has no one than this to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends. Jesus, we thank you for those words of comfort, those words of joy that you love us, that you have given us your good commands, that you count us as your very friends.

And we ask, Father, for all that we need through your son and by your spirit to live lives that bring glory to you. keep us headed in the right direction.

And, Father, help each of us in this church to love each other as we have been loved. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing in response to what we've heard this morning.