

The Problem of Loneliness

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Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 00] Now, let us read from God's Word in Proverbs chapter 18. Proverbs chapter 18. This is on page 507 of the Black Pew Bible, which you should have in the pocket in front of you.

Proverbs 18 from verse 10. This is the Word of God. The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous man runs into it and is safe.

A rich man's wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall is his imagination. Before destruction, a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor.

If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame. A man's spirit will endure sickness, but a crushed spirit, who can bear?

An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge. A man's gift makes room for him and brings him before the great.

[1 : 14] The one who states his case first seems right until the other comes and examines him. The lot puts an end to quarrels and decides between powerful contenders.

A brother offended is more unyielding than a strong city, and quarreling is like the bars of a castle. From the fruit of a man's mouth, his stomach is satisfied.

He is satisfied by the yield of his lips. Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits. He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.

The poor use entreaties, but the rich answer roughly. A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory, our supreme concern through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[2 : 36] Amen. Facebook friends, Strava friends, Instagram friends, school friends, uni friends, college friends, everyone has friends.

But for all that, why are we lonelier than we have ever been? According to the British website Campaign to End Loneliness, in 2022, nearly 50% of all British adults reported feeling lonely occasionally, sometimes, often, or always.

Approximately 7% of people experience chronic loneliness. Meaning that they are lonely often, or always. It defines loneliness in this way.

Loneliness is a subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship. It happens when there is a mismatch between the quantity and quality of the social relationships that we have, and those that we want.

When we put it like that, how many friends do we really have?

[4 : 11] Do our friendships really satisfy us? Are they really all that we need, or that we want?

You know, the Christian gospel promises us a deeper friendship than anything this world can provide. Deeper even than the friendship that exists between a husband and his wife.

In Proverbs 18, 24, we read these words. A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

If we are Christians, we have a friend who sticks closer to us than a brother. And if we are not yet Christians here today, the friendship of one who promises to stick closer to us than a brother is freely offered to us.

The living Jesus is that friend. And in the gospel, he promises he shall be no fair weather companion, but a friend who sticks closer to us than any brother.

[5 : 23] The living Jesus, through his Holy Spirit, promises to satisfy us and to give us the quantity and quality of friendship we've always needed and always wanted.

He campaigns to end loneliness by offering himself to every one of us here today. The Jesus who offers himself to us as the friend who sticks closer than any brother.

Well, there are two aspects of this friendship to which I wish to draw your attention. First, Jesus Christ is a friend greater than any other.

Where we'll consider together the wording of this verse and what it tells us about the superiority of his friendship. And secondly, Jesus Christ is a friend like no other.

Where we'll apply this remarkable teaching from the Bible. So, especially teenagers, students, younger people. Are you lonely today?

[6 : 30] The living Jesus, through his Spirit-inspired word, the Bible, is offering himself to us as the friend who sticks closer than any brother.

Will you have him? Will you have him? First of all then, Jesus Christ is a friend greater than any other.

A friend greater than any other. King Solomon, the author and collector of these Proverbs, writes, A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there's a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Perhaps he had in mind the experience of his father, King David. Who, for all the companions he ever had, would have come to ruin had it not been for the friendship of Jonathan, the son of Saul.

We first learn about that friendship in 1 Samuel 18, verse 1. Where we read these words, lovely words. The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David.

[7 : 39] And Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Later in 2 Samuel 1, verse 25, when David hears of Jonathan's death, he is deeply grieved and he writes, I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan.

Very pleasant you have been to me. Your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of woman. Never a man had a friend like King David did in Jonathan.

Many of David's other friends proved false and would have ruined him. But Jonathan stuck closer to him than a brother. After all, King David's own brothers weren't great examples of brotherhood, were they?

In our verse, there are three explicit contrasts stated. The first is between the many companions we may have and the one friend we must have.

We all have many people in our lives we call friends. But the kind of friendship Solomon is talking about here is singular. One friend. The friendship of whom exceeds and surpasses all the companionships and acquaintances we have.

[9 : 01] The friendship of whom satisfies us completely so that though we may have other friendships in life, this really is the only one we need and the only one we desire.

The second contrast is between the quality of the friendships. A person, a man may have many companions where the word companions, a very weak form of the word friend.

Acquaintance perhaps is a better word. But the one who sticks closer than any other is a true friend. Where the word doesn't mean friend as much as it means the one who loves.

The root meaning of the Hebrew word *achev* means love. Literally, there is one who loves. Who sticks closer than a brother.

He's no fair weather companion who laughs when you laugh, but you don't see him for dust when you're crying. He is a friend who truly loves you from the heart.

[10 : 04] The third contrast is between the character of the friendships. The one with many companions may come to ruin. A word which can be variously translated as end in a sad state.

Be burst asunder or be broken in pieces. For all that this man may have many companions, they can't stop his ruin. They can't halt his sadness.

They can't meet his deepest needs. But the one friend, this one who loves us from the heart, he sticks closer than a brother to us.

This word sticks closer can be variously translated as joined, cleaved together, or even in a related form, soldered.

This is a friend who is soldered to us. This is a friend who can stop our ruin, who can halt our sadness, who can meet our deepest needs, because he is joined to us, and we are joined to him.

[11 : 15] King David lost his best friend Jonathan to death and mortality, but the friend who sticks closer to us than a brother shall never be separated from us by death.

So here we have three contrasts between the kind of friendships we may have in this world, with the kind of friendship we may have with the living Christ, the greater than David.

He, in and of himself, is the one friendship we need, which exceeds and surpasses all the friendships we may have in this world.

The quality of Jesus' friendship is far from casual. It finds its source in his love for us. He is literally the one who loves us.

And he sticks closer to us, the text tells us, than even a brother. Surely Jesus Christ is the friend greater than any other.

[12 : 17] We may have many friendships in this life, some of them really rather close, but if we do not have this greatest of all friendships with the living Christ Jesus, none of the others will satisfy.

It is not a case of friendship with Jesus or friendship with other people. It is that friendship with Jesus enriches our friendships with other people.

It allows us to be who we really are without having to wear a mask or pretend to be something we aren't. But ultimately, the greatest, ultimately, without that greatest of friendships, friendship with Jesus, will be lonely our whole lives through.

For whereas many can speak into our ears, only Jesus Christ can speak into our hearts and hear our hearts groans. Never will we find a friend who loves us like Jesus does.

Someone whose love is so absorbed in us and has no self-interest at all. Some who I once considered friends prove themselves false, not because they're bad people, but because it's in the nature of sinful human beings like us to be self-absorbed.

[13 : 34] We will never find Jesus Christ false in his love for us. He will never let us down, never disappoint us, never leave us when the going gets tough.

And never will we find a friend whose friendship is so stubbornly unbreakable as that of the Lord Jesus.

There are many things that can break human friendships, but nothing can break the friendship Jesus has with us. We may at times try to shake him off, but we cannot.

He has cleaved himself to us. He has soldered to us, even as two pieces of metal are unbreakably joined to each other. His friendship, this friendship with God the Son himself, is the transforming friendship which satisfies our souls, and even though we may be alone, having Jesus as our friend means that we never need to be lonely again, for his friendship is greater than any other.

And it's a friendship, you know, he offers to every one of us here this morning. No matter how long we've lived without the Lord Jesus, no matter how many fruitless and empty ways we've tried to satisfy ourselves, he offers his hand of friendship today to every one of us with all love, with all sincerity, not because he must, and not because he needs our friendship to satisfy him, but because like King David, he loves us even as he loves his own soul.

[15 : 22] Through his word, he is offering his hand of friendship to us. He is offering to put to an end our loneliness and to fill our lives with love unspeakable.

Will we take his hand in ours that for the first time will tell him how it really is with us, and let him be to us the friend who sticks closer than any brother.

Jesus is a friend who is greater than any other. But then secondly, he is a friend like no other.

He is a friend like no other. How much deeper the friendship of Jesus than that of our Facebook and Strava friends? How much greater the friendship of Jesus than any other?

Joseph Scriven was an Irish man. He was a minister who emigrated to Canada in the mid-19th century, leaving behind him an aging mother in County Down.

[16 : 24] Some years later, he received a letter from home telling him that his mother was very ill and was missing him terribly. Deeply worried, he wrote his sick mother a letter, the contents of which were later put into the form of a hymn.

We know it as the popular gospel hymn we'll sing at the end, What a friend we have in Jesus. What a friend we have in Jesus. What Scriven's mother so desperately needed in her loneliness and illness was to enjoy for herself a refreshing experience of the friendship of the living Jesus, the Jesus who can all our sorrows share.

For the Jesus who offers us his hand of friendship today is a friend like no other. He is first a friend to love us and second to be with us.

Only a fool thinks he can live without the friendship of Jesus. And more important still, only a fool thinks he can die without the friendship of Jesus.

We have in Jesus then, first of all, a friend to love us. A friend to love us. We say from Proverbs 18, 24 that the exact Hebrew wording of friend is the one who loves.

[17 : 58] During his public ministry, Jesus had many friends. One of them was John the Apostle, the so-called disciple whom Jesus loved. Another was Lazarus.

He was famous for being raised from the dead. Think of Jesus' love for Lazarus. See how he loved him. It was no less than intellectual love, but it was far more than intellectual love.

For when Lazarus died, we read Jesus wept. The death of Lazarus broke his heart. Clearly his love for Lazarus filled his heart.

It is a deeply effective love he has. At the right hand of God the Father in heaven today sits the risen and exalted Lord Jesus.

Before him fly millions of heavenly angels who along with the countless other holy inhabitants of heaven constantly praise and worship him, adoring and bowing down before his majesty.

[19 : 06] He speaks and the earth moves. By his mighty power the whole universe is sustained in motion and existence. In his sovereign authority, he controls all that comes to pass in nations and in solar systems and in galaxies.

And there at the right hand of God the Father in heaven sits a Jesus who loves you with all his heart and soul and strength.

and mind who thinks so fondly of you and whose heart is drawn out in love and compassion toward you.

Never will we find a friend who loves us like Jesus Christ does. And what makes this all the more amazing is that never will we find a friend who knows more about us than Jesus does.

There's nothing about us he doesn't know. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He sees into the inner recesses of our hearts and he knows our secret thoughts.

[20 : 16] We might share many things with our secret friends but there are some things that we know about ourselves that we do not even wish to admit to ourselves. And Jesus knows them all.

And he knows far more besides. He knows our weaknesses and he knows our sins. He knows the perversity of our thoughts and the selfish motives and the selfish motives which lie behind our good actions.

He knows our inner hatreds and our hypocrisies even in holy things. How we pretend to be so good when in reality we really are so bad.

He knows our unbelief and our sinful ways. He sees that we have hearts blackened by our sin. He knows it all and yet he loves us the same with that steady, faithful, unconditional love of which he alone is capable.

How he loves us. If others really knew us perhaps they'd want nothing to do with us. But he who knows us best loves us most.

[21 : 23] He is a friend like no other. Child or adult male or female he who knows you best loves you most.

And even in this world no one including yourself knows you well or loves you at all. He knows you and he loves you.

But his love for you is greater than this immeasurably deeper. The love of Christ and his affections is a great thing but the love of Christ and his actions is greater still.

If we should ever doubt that he loves us and that he's the friend who sticks closer than a brother look at the cross on which he suffered and died. Not as the victim of some tragic miscarriage of justice but as the loving sacrifice to take away all our guilt and sin.

He died there with us on his mind and his heart. The Jesus who on the cross although we hated him loved us.

[22 : 32] He died there as the sacrifice as our substitute paying the price of our sin and dying the death we deserve to die because because he loves us.

His love is shaped like a cross. Never will we find someone like Jesus whose love for us is like no other.

Someone whose gospel love for us goes deeper than any of us will ever know. No wonder Joseph Scriven could write what a friend we have in Jesus.

What a friend indeed who will not whose love will not let us go but die to win us for himself. In him is love and he is love.

The friend who will always love us. He freely offers us his hand of friendship today. Will you take his hand and will you receive it for yourself?

[23 : 39] A friend to love us and then lastly a friend to be with us. A friend to be with us. The hearts of David and Jonathan were knit together in love and friendship but that friendship ended when Jonathan was truly killed in battle.

David lived for many years after and though he may have wished that Jonathan could have been with him all those years his friend was dead. even the closest of human friendships are limited by space and time.

We might wish that our friend was always with us but even then all of us need our own personal space just time to be by ourselves.

There will always come a point at which for one reason or another our friendship cools. it may be a change of heart it may be a change of partner it may be a change in circumstances it may even be the dark cold grip of death.

But Jesus the friend who is like no other promises that he will always be with us always. Never leave us he'll never forsake us the king of king pledges that though our mothers and fathers should forsake us and abandon us he will take us up he makes his promise with no conditions attached.

[25 : 16] We have an expression laugh and the whole world laughs with you cry and you cry alone many of us know from bitter experience how true that is laugh and the whole world laughs with you cry and you cry alone our tears are compounded by our loneliness at the absence of those who call themselves our friends but have proved false.

Laugh and Jesus laughs with you cry and Jesus cries with you our moods and emotions are no barrier to his divine presence with us our health and our weakness are no barrier to his being with us our frustrations our depressions our anxieties are no barrier to him being with us we may not always feel that he's there but he is as surely as day follows night the heavenly Christ by his spirit is always with us he's with us in the morning and in the evening he's with us in the day and the night he's with us in the tears of joy and the tears of grief he's with us at work and at home he's with us when we're all by ourselves and when we're in company he's with us always and forever we walk through the shadows and he walks beside us we enter into the darkness and we find him there whispering into our hearts never will I leave you my dear friend never will I forsake you so precious these words so precious that we can speak them in Psalm 23 verse 4 yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death

I will fear no evil for thou art with me what a place to find the king of kings who alone lives in unapproachable light here he is he's in the valley of the shadow of death and yet to be with us he walks there he is with us there and when it comes time for us to breathe our last breath though our dear loved ones may be gathered around our bed they cannot follow us where we are going into death through death and beyond death but Jesus the friend who sticks closer than a brother is there holding our hands and our hearts in his receiving us to himself all the time whispering these words into the ears of our souls never will I leave you never will I forsake you

I am with you now be at peace for these and for a thousand other reasons we want Jesus we need Jesus to be the friend who sticks closer than a brother to us maybe there are some here today for whom all this is new you've never thought of the Christian faith in this way and it all seems rather strange almost too good to be true that Jesus Christ the Lord of glory should offer his hand of friendship and sincerely want us to take it and that having taken it we should find Joseph Scriven's words to be true what a friend we have in Jesus yes indeed it's too good to be true because it is true are you lonely today Jesus offers a want in a lifetime opportunity to receive the friendship of one who sticks closer to us than a brother if King

Charles III should offer us his friendship we'd be honored and charmed and I guess none of us would reject it but the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords today offers us a greater friendship again and what fools we should be to reject him he is the King who died for us on the cross and loves us even though he knows everything about us even now let us hold out the hands of our hearts to him what we Christians call faith and receive his hand in ours let us call upon him to be our saviour lord and the friend who sticks closer than any brother loneliness be gone the risen and exalted lord of glory Jesus Christ himself offers today to join himself to us in an everlasting friendship will you have him will you have him if any should want to speak to me after the service

[30 : 28] I'll be in the vestry out the back there while everyone else is having tea and coffee let us pray it should seem oh lord to us such a flight of fancy that your beloved son should extend his hand of friendship to us and say I'm the friend who will stick closer to you than a brother we ask and pray today oh lord that in your grace you would move our hearts to reach forth our hands to him and say I will I would have that transforming friendship for myself in Jesus name we pray these things amen for yourself asking please let me come to