

Jesus and His Friends

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Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 00] Let's turn for a few moments tonight to John chapter 15, John chapter 15 and words you find in verse 15. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing.

But I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my father I have made known to you. Especially those words, I have called you friends.

The idea of friendship is obviously there in the verses surrounding it from where he begins saying that greater love is no one than this. That a man lays down his life for his friends.

I am not calling you any longer servants, but I have called you friends. Meals and friendship go particularly well together.

It's always a rather sad sight, although of course there are some times inevitably when we have to eat on our own, the providence of God. But it's still a rather sad sight to see someone eating on their own, especially when it's a situation where they've perhaps fallen out with someone.

[1 : 22] And they're just eating on their own because of a quarrel, because there's a separation, because instead of friendship something's come between them. And therefore they are gone their separate ways.

Meals are associated with friendship, not only in our common understanding of it, but frequently in the Bible as well. And it's not at all an accident that the Lord's Supper takes the form of a meal. It's not that we're eating or drinking much in the physical sense, but what we are taking physically in the bread and in the cup are representative.

They're symbolic. They are elements that set out for us a feeding spiritually, which is really what the Lord's Supper is about. The Westminster Confession, our Catechisms, summarizing the meaning of the sacraments, said that the Lord's Supper is a feeding upon Christ crucified and all the benefits of his death.

There is no meal like it. That's what we actually do spiritually as we feed upon, as we take the elements of bread and the cup with the wine.

[2 : 43] We're feeding upon, through faith, by faith, feeding upon Christ himself and the benefits of his death. As we remember his death in the way he has appointed, he has appointed it in such a way that the very form of a meal, people sitting around a meal at a table and sharing the elements are themselves symbolic and significant of what it is to actually be in friendship with God, with our Saviour and with one another.

And of course we do that, the church is required to do that till Christ returns. By this you show forth, said Paul, the death of the Lord.

You show forth his death. You proclaim it. You actually show it out manifestly till he come. And as we think about the coming of Christ, even while we're taking the meal of feeding upon his atonement, upon the benefits he has got for us by his death, we're thinking ahead to his coming and what is involved in his coming and what's on the other side then of his coming.

And that too is a meal. Because it's described in the Bible as the marriage supper of the Lamb. When we are no longer in this life, in these conditions, when we are exalted and glorified with Christ, our eternal context, our eternal situation, is going to be one of permanently being at a spiritual banquet where we are the guests of the Lord, where we share together in a perfect way on all that he has provided for us, where we feed our souls, our very persons, to all eternity without end upon all that Christ has achieved by his death.

And when you come to actually think about the Lord's Supper and the elements that are used, the bread and then the cup with the wine, both of course represent the Lord in his death.

[4 : 59] The bread representing his body, the broken body, and the cup with shed blood. But they both amount to the same thing.

In that sense, they represent for us, as we see them and as we partake of them, they represent the Lord's death or the Lord in his death. And yet there is a difference between them in this sense that only of the second is there an additional description given where Jesus said of the bread, this is my body, which is for you or which is broken for you.

Of the cup, he said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. In other words, he specifically attached to the cup the emphasis on covenant.

He didn't do that with the bread. But he did do that with the cup. And although the cup and the bread represent the same thing essentially in the death of Christ, yet it is significant that the Lord said of the cup, this cup is the new covenant.

And of course, a covenant is something that itself brings in the friendship aspect of what it's about. Because when you have a covenant, you have something between those who have entered into that covenant.

[6 : 25] You have a bond. You have something that unites them in a common consent, in a common concern, in a common heritage, something that is common to them, whatever the covenant is about.

And there are all kinds of covenants in the ordinary sense. But whatever kind of covenant it is, the people involved in that covenant, whether it's two or two thousand, but they all actually focus their minds, they are all together bound by the terms of, and the provisions, of that covenant.

And that's particularly so when you look at the whole idea of friendship as well. One of the great illustrations of friendship in the Bible is the friendship of David and Jonathan.

And more than once, you'll find, as you go through that description of their friendship, and of all the way that they related to each other as friends, and how they help one another, you'll find that they made a covenant with each other.

Their friendship was bound together in a formal way in a covenant by which their friendship was cemented and united, and by which they were pledging to be bound to each other, to be friends, to be supporters, to carry out their side of the covenant.

[7 : 49] And that's what you want to just briefly bring into the way in which Jesus and his friends meet together at the Lord's Supper.

So that when they take the bread, and when they take the cup, they are aware of the fact that he has described that cup in friendship terms.

And there's a sense in which we have to be careful because we do emphasize that both the bread and the wine signify his death. But there's a sense in which the bread, as it were, as it signifies his death, is really almost preparing us because we take that one first.

And that's also important, the way the Lord actually arranged the order in which we take the elements. We don't take the cup first. We take the bread first. And that leads on to the cup.

As if he's saying to us, there's an emphasis on my body and the sufferings that I endured and my body broken for you. In order that you could take the cup which, yes, represents my death, but to which I have added the emphasis of friendship with me.

[9 : 02] Through my sufferings, you have come to know friendship with the Lord. And as you engage in that friendship and as you know it in your life, you are found in covenant with Christ.

You are bonded in friendship with him. Think of the bread, first of all. Jake, each said, Jesus, this is my body which is broken for you.

Romans chapter 5, verse 10, one of the great texts that we frequently refer to, 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.

Now, my point is not to go into the theology of that verse itself, but only as far as it does emphasize and remind us that when we were made friends with God, it happened while we were still enemies. Friendship is, between those who have fallen out, is reestablished by reconciliation. And that is one of the great achievements of the cross of Christ, the reconciliation that the Apostle Paul, especially, elaborates on and expands on in his writings.

[10 : 23] This reconciliation that God has brought about, that he has set, that he has brought into being and established permanently. It is through the death of Christ.

We were enemies when God set about that particular friendship being established. If, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God.

You see, we did not come, you know this yourselves, we didn't come to God and ask him, please put aside the quarrel. We didn't come to God and say, we would like again to have friendship reestablished between us.

We were at enmity with God. There was a hostility from God's side that needed to be dealt with, a hostility that wasn't caused by God, but caused by our sin, by our rebellion, by our antagonism against God and against his will and against his command, by our fall from the grace in which he created us.

But God didn't leave it at that. God took the initiative. God in his grace came across the divide that had come between us and him.

[11 : 35] God himself came in eternity to make that provision so that without our help and without our request and without our asking, God sent his son into the world to deal with this enmity, to deal with this quarrel, to deal with this need to be reconciled to him.

When you take this bread and indeed this cup too, but when you take this bread, this is my body which is broken for you. Why was it broken for you?

It was broken for you to mend the relationship, to bring an end to hostilities, to reconcile us to God, to establish friendship.

In other words, instead of God treating his enemies that you and I as we deserve to be treated, instead, he treated his beloved son as he did not deserve to be treated.

Instead of treating us as the enemies we were deserved, in saying to us, what you have done is not mendable, I am not going to come across to mend that, to reconcile you.

[12 : 53] We would have deserved that, that would have been just of God. Instead of that, he did come to us, he did provide for us, he did have a burden towards us as estranged from him.

a burden of love, a burden of mercy, to end the quarrel, to bring about reconciliation.

He did it in such an amazing way. He did it, we understand, from the Bible because it is such an incredibly great and deep thing, the death of Jesus, his beloved son.

And as theologians have frequently said, if any other way short of that could have been possible, might have been possible, would God not have done it, rather than give his only begotten son, to actually bear the penalty of our sin, and bear our hell, and die our death on the cross, but that is what happened, and we remember him, as he has himself instituted, this do, in remembrance of me.

What are we remembering? We are remembering what came from eternity towards us. We are remembering the love and the mercy that found us in our sins. We are remembering, as Ezekiel 16 put it, as God passed us by and found us abandoned and wallowing in our own blood that we had caused, unwashed, uncared for, untreated, unwanted, except by God and his love's search for his people.

[14 : 33] Then he said, I saw you. And I passed by you. I cast my cloak over you. For it was the time of love.

It's love, especially that wants to reconcile, and it's love that goes out of its way to reconcile.

Blessed, said Jesus, are the peacemakers.

What are peacemakers? Peacemakers are people who bring reconciliation. Peacemakers is a description of disciples as they follow the pattern of their father.

What did Jesus say about the peacemakers? Blessed are they, yes, but what did he then say?

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

They are like their father who made peace with them when they were still enemies. and it involved, as we're reminded in the bread, the breaking of Jesus through his human nature.

[15 : 38] It's not simply the breaking of his body. Remember, Jesus took what the catechism calls a reasonable soul, a rational soul, the same kind of soul that you and I have, with all the faculties that you and I have spiritually, not just a body, but a mind, and a will, and emotions, and a conscience, and a sense of a pronouncement in our souls of good or bad, in his case, always good.

He took to himself what would enable him as the son of God. Remember what we said on the Lord's day, the author of life could not die, could not experience in his divine life decay and change, but he took out human nature, he took a whole human nature, he took body and soul to himself to enable him to experience our situation and to bear our penalty and to suffer the agonies that were

involved in bearing our sin, he became for us all that the Bible describes in being made sin and a curse to reconcile us to God.

everything about Jesus was broken. I know we read in the scriptures that when the soldiers came and found him hanging on the cross and saw that he was already dead, instead of breaking his legs as they were breaking the legs of all who were crucified, as a matter of course they saw he was already dead, there was no need to break his legs so that it would be fulfilled as it's written in the scripture, a bone of him shall not be broken, his bones were not broken, and yet everything else was broken, his heart was broken, his soul was broken, his sense of relationship with God was broken, why have you forsaken me?

you come to be made whole, to have your life put together, to be reconciled to God through Christ's brokenness, and when you see that bread broken, when you take the piece of that bread that belongs to the whole batch, to the whole loaf, remember that the breaking off of the piece you're going to take is significant, it's significant not just because it's your share of the supper, but it graphically illustrates for you that what represented by that bread being broken is the brokenness of your Savior, that he was willing to be broken, and what a breaking, so that we would be mended, so that our relationship with God and with each other would be reestablished.

Remember that the whole human nature of the Lord was involved in the sufferings that he suffered for his people. Every aspect of his human nature, mysterious though it is, to the deepest part of his soul, in all of that he experienced physically, mentally, and spiritually the sufferings that purchased your redemption, the agony of the cross, the brokenness of the Son of God.

[19 : 33] Take, eat, this is my body, it's for you, as my friends. And then this cup, the cup is the new covenant in my blood.

The covenant, as we said, is a binding agreement, it's an agreement where those on each side of the covenant are pledged on their side mutually to uphold the terms of that covenant.

And it's like that with God and ourselves as well. God has his side of the covenant, whatever is required of God in making a covenant with us, a covenant of life, a new covenant.

God has pledged to keep his side of the covenant and we know that that will not be broken. We know that that will not change. What is his side of the covenant? I will be a God to you and to your children.

I will be a God to you. I will be your God, I will be your saviour, I will be your father, I will be your leader, your guide, your upholder, your protector. And the other side he says that you shall be my people.

[20 : 40] You'll be for me, you'll live for me, you'll be my witnesses, you'll bear my name, you'll be known as the people of God in your own generations.

covenant. In this sense is based upon reconciliation, what we've just mentioned. Friendship is something when it's re-established between two who have quarreled, let's just put it that way, two who have had friendship re-established when the quarrel is ended, you could say they're entering into a new covenant with each other, a new bond by which they pledge to uphold their friendship, their companionship each side of the covenant.

And in the ordinary sense, a re-establishing of friendship is always a bit dodgy, isn't it, if the quarrel isn't really and completely given up.

You know plenty of situations, I'm sure, where things have been sort of patched up and where a dispute has come to be dealt with and both sides brought together or both individuals brought together, but it's not just quite, you know, it's not quite totally over, yes, it's covered over, but they're still lurking behind that, because it's just a patch up, there are still issues.

And it's not really going to take much for the issues to be brought back up again, and the quarrel re-begun, and the division again sets in. There's absolutely nothing and no question of that in the bond between God and his people.

[22 : 33] There's nothing whatsoever left that needs dealt with, that the blood of Christ has not adequately and finally and forever more dealt with.

you see, you cannot imagine God actually coming to say, here is the record of your life, here is the page that actually shows your life up to the time that you came to know me, that you were reconciled to me, and here is now the record made clean, and I've signed the bottom, and he shuts the book, and you can't imagine him then saying, but I'm going to put it up on the shelf here, so that when you do, if you do go astray in any way, I'll take it down again, and I'll open it up again, and therefore there's a kind of threat hanging over you, as if God kept that as it were in reserve, ready to

take it out again, when you've committed something that you shouldn't have done, when you know that you've sinned, when you've wronged him, it's not there, it's gone through the shredder, it'll never be put back together again, your record as a lost, unforgiven sinner is gone, absolutely gone, so come to the

Lord's table, with that conviction in mind, come to the Lord's table, sure and confident, that the covenant God has made with you, is a covenant that includes, that your record has been paid, in the blood of Jesus Christ, that there is nothing on God's side, that is in any way or at any time, going to be brought out again to face you, so that it will re-condemn you, or re-establish the quarrel between you, and bring the enmity back again between you and your God, he has saved you, that's it, don't come to the Lord's table with any element of suspicion, that some who are others can't quite be as good as that, that's one of the great problems in witnessing to God to people who are unsaved, and especially in preaching the gospel to the unsaved, what is it?

It's really that you're facing this problem that people will have it in mind, that what you're telling them as the good news of Christ and all that he has done, it's just too good to be true, and people will say, it can't just be as good as that, it can't just be as clear cut as that, as clean as that, and you have to say, and I have to say then in response to the idea that somehow or other there's something else lurking on the side of God, and he's going to bring it out against us if we're not careful, you have to say, it's too good not to be true.

It is that good, and that perfect, and that clean, that you can come and say, I can build my whole eternity on that reconciliation.

[25 : 55] creation. I can put my reputation, I can put my faults, I can put my failures, I can put all the sins that I've ever committed, and ever will commit, I can put them there, I can put all my burdens, I can put everything that is in my life, past, present, and future, I can put it on that, and I can be sure of this, that the blood of Christ is great enough to make sure that I'm never again condemned.

That's why you come to the Lord's table in remembrance of him, it's not because you're good enough, it's not because you're better than you were last year, it's not because you've seen yourself something of an increased worthiness, it's not because you've worked yourself up to some sort of level of worthiness by which you're now in a position to be able to take communion, it's because the Lord has done everything for you, it's because his blood has made a covenant that is secured in his blood, don't stay away because you think you're unworthy, you'll never be worthy of it, and you'll be spending eternity, however many times you've taken communion in this world, you'll be spending eternity at the marriage supper of the Lamb still saying, Lord, I am unworthy, but you'll be admiring his worthiness, as it's covered your own, and keeps it covered forever more, what's the covenant, this cup is the new covenant in my blood,

God, and supposing even if God wanted to hold something in reserve against us, which of course we know he would not do and does not do, but even if he wanted to just for the sake of argument and using human language, even if he wanted to, he couldn't, why couldn't he?

because the blood that was shed demands your full acceptance and your permanent acceptance, your eternal acceptance, you know, when Jesus rose from the dead, he didn't quite, as we often say, he didn't quite leave the grave empty, when they looked into the sepulcher they saw the grave clothed lying there as he had risen out of them, they didn't belong to him anymore, they belonged to death, to the realm of death, which has no place in the resurrection life, but if you look carefully into the grave, in your own reckoning as a Christian, you see something else there, you see the quarrel that was between you and God, it's also there, it didn't rise with

Christ, he didn't keep hold a part of it when he rose from the dead, he made sure it was buried and remained buried forever, forever, this cup is the new covenant, the new bond, a new pledge where you are my friends, henceforth I do not call you servants, but I call you my friends, and the covenant in Christ is for his friends, for those reconciled by his death to God, and that means, of course, finally, communion, he's not calling us his servants, but his friends, although of course, in other sense, we are his servants, we are his obedient servants, that's why we do the things that he has commanded, which he says, if you do what

[30 : 12] I command you, you will be my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you, that's important as well, it's interesting that he combines the matter of being his friends and being his servants as well, but what he's saying is I've made known to you, because I've not kept back from you, what's significant about my life and what I've heard from the father, I've made known this to

you, that's why I'm calling you my friends, I've revealed to you what my life's about, what the purpose of my life and death is about, and the covenant, of course, through reconciliation, must actually involve fellowship or communion, you cannot think of people in covenant, two or however many, without actually in friendship, having communion, having a meaningful relationship, a loving relationship with each other.

Where better is that represented, and indeed experienced, than at the Lord's Supper. It's one of the great tragedies of church history that the Lord's Supper, down through the course of history, has been and was a means of dispute, a means of falling out among Christians, sometimes over minor details regarding how the elements are distributed and some of the language used or whatever.

The Lord's Supper, as much as anything else, and more than most, ought to be one of the means that God has given us, to unite, to bond, to establish relationships of love.

That's why he's saying here, this is why I've spoken to you, that you love one another. This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you. And then he went on to talk about friendship.

You cannot detach friendship from loving one another. It's the essence of friends, that they love each other, and the love that we have for each other is patterned on the love that Jesus had for us and has for us, in establishing friendship and maintaining friendship in covenant with us.

[32 : 37] And that's why it's so significant that the Lord's Supper is in fact called the Communion. We speak about it commonly like that. We're coming to the Communion.

We're going to the Communion somewhere else. It's the Communion. the Lord's Supper. And that means Communion not just with one another, which is true, but also with God in the first place.

The Communion is about fellowship with God, feasting upon Christ, sitting with Christ at the Lord's Supper, at his table. Communion with Jesus.

Communion with Jesus filtering through into communion with each other. And that's why we're saying that a meal and friendship go so well together.

Because there is in friends being together round a table and enjoying the things of the table, there is such an element of enjoyment in that, isn't there?

[33 : 39] There's such an element even of desire as you look forward to the occasion when you're going to spend time with your friends round the table, sharing fellowship, enjoying each other's company.

Well, it's the same with the Lord's Supper. Luke chapter 22, verse 15, Jesus said to the disciples, With ardent desire, I have desired to eat this Passover with you.

The Lord still has that desire, to meet with his people in fellowship, he longs for that fellowship, if we can use these words, his desire is to come to meet with his people as they gather together at the remembrance of his death, yes, and on other occasions as well, we're confining it to the Lord's Supper, no thoughts of being at the Lord's Supper, God willing, this Lord's day.

With desire, I have desired to eat this with you, think of Jesus, having said that and saying that about ourselves and our prospect of being at his table and our desire perhaps even to be there for the first time, isn't it enough for us that the Lord is saying about this occasion, he has a desire that we should be there, are we going to miss out on it, knowing that he has that desire, but of course that desire is met by desire on our part too.

We desire to be there because we know what it's about. We desire to be there because of all that he has said about it and has associated with it.

[35 : 29] It's a means of grace, it's a feeding upon Christ, it's a spiritual nourishment, it's something that we cannot afford to miss out on for the good of our souls, for our spiritual growth.

Again, there's a wrong kind of mystique about what it is to be ready to go to the Lord's table. When you look into the early church in the New Testament, you don't find any evidence at all there that the disciples, the apostles would say to those who are new Christians, well you mustn't take communion for at least a year, for at least six months, for at least two years, you mustn't come until you've attained a certain degree, of knowledge, of theology, of whatever else, you mustn't come until you're somewhat more like those who've been there many times before.

This do in remembrance of me. That's all you need. That you know him and love him and desire to be with him at his table, knowing how significant it is in your life, knowing what he means to you, knowing that he is your friend, and that he has made you his friend.

This cup is the new covenant in my blood. And you know, there's something about that desire, the desire to be with Christ and with his people, desire, and especially desire to be there because he is there and because his promises are attached to being there.

There's something about that desire that just lifts it above desire in the ordinary sense. It's a really special spiritual desire.

[37 : 28] You can actually say that it lifts you up even towards the very desire that God has in the salvation of lost in us. It's that kind of desire.

And all you've got to do is compare Isaiah 53, 2 with Psalm 73, verse 25. Isaiah 53, 2.

There is no beauty in him that we should desire him. That's where we begin things. That's where he finds us.

That's where we are his enemies. That's where we are estranged from him. We don't see any beauty in him that we should desire him.

And you're lifted out of that. and his reconciling grace has brought you to be now in the position of the psalmist.

[38 : 32] Whom do I have in heaven but you? And on earth there is none I desire besides you.

It's a long journey spiritually. From the first text to the second. But he's taken you on that journey.

And that's why you're placed us at the Lord's table. At the Lord's supper. At the spiritual meal. As friends and guests of Jesus by whom we have been reconciled to God.

And as the song of Solomon puts it eat. Eat. Oh friends. Drink deeply.

Oh beloved. Let's pray. O gracious Lord we thank you for the desire that you have placed in our hearts.

[39 : 41] The desire that can only be satisfied in communion with you. A desire that we know you do satisfy. And yet in giving us the satisfaction you increase the desire for more.

we bless you for every way that you meet that desire. In the gospel and fellowship with your people through your word, through our private devotions and being together at the Lord's table.

Lord encourage us we pray that whatever doubts we may harbor we may never have doubts about you, about your sincerity, about the quality of your reconciliation which is the basis on which we come.

Grant us your blessing we pray for Jesus sake. Amen.