

I HAVE FOUND A FRIEND IN JESUS (1)

Mike McDaniel

What is a friend? What are some characteristics and qualities of friends? Among other things, a friend is one who is loyal, who is honest, who helps in times of trouble, and who remains when all have fled. An English publication once offered a prize for the best definition of a friend. Thousands of answers were received, and the one that was given first prize was this: "A friend is the one who comes in when the whole world is gone out." Truly, "he who findeth a friend findeth a great treasure."

The Bible also has a lot to say about friends. We know if a term is used once in the Bible, that it is an important word, yet the word "friend" is used some 106 times in the pages of Scripture! "Friend," as used in the New Testament, most often comes from the Greek word "phileo" which means love. We derive our English words "philosophy" (lover of wisdom) and "Philadelphia" (city of brotherly love) from this word. Therefore, a friend is one who loves. As Solomon said, "A friend loveth at all times" (Prov. 17:17). "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel" (Prov. 27:9).

Jehovah spoke "unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend" (Ex. 33:11). Jehovah counted Abraham as being his friend (Jam. 2:23). David and Jonathan were genuine friends. So were Naomi and Ruth. So were Paul and Timothy. So were Paul and Aquilla and Priscilla.

Deity is the greatest friend we can have. The Father desires to be our friend. So does the Christ. So does the Holy Spirit. Jesus gave the most stately and superior of all friendship definitions in our text of John 15:13-15. We cherish true friends, and Jesus is our friend. If you are a Christian, you may say today with great confidence and assurance, "I have found a friend in Jesus!" Consider with me please the following reasons why Jesus is our friend.

(1) SINCE HE GAVE HIS LIFE FOR US, I HAVE FOUND A FRIEND IN JESUS.

If someone pushes me out of the path of an oncoming car, he not only saves my life, but he risks his in the process. He is willing to take that chance because he is my friend. Jesus was willing, not only to risk His life, but to give it for you and me. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15:13). "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for **the ungodly**. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet **sinners**, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. 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" (Rom. 5:6-10). How great was the Love of Jesus that He would die for us, the ungodly, sinners, yea, enemies! We might be willing to give our lives for a person having godly virtues and values, but how many would be willing to die for people at the opposite end of the spectrum? Would we die for Jezebel? Judas Iscariot? Nero? Hitler? Jack the Ripper? Probably none of us would, yet Jesus did. However, Jesus would die to make us His friends, to reconcile us to His Heavenly Father by His death on the cross. His ultimate and supreme sacrifice makes possible the redemption and salvation of all – conditioned upon man's response of obedience. Friendship to the Savior requires the

keeping of his commands. "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (Jn. 15:14). When we have heard his word proclaimed (Rom. 10:17), and have believed it (Jn. 8:21,24), have repented genuinely (Lk. 13:3), and have courageously confessed faith in the Deity of Christ (Rom. 10:9,10), and have put Him on in the waters of baptism (Gal. 3:27), Jesus becomes our forgiving friend and adds us to the beautiful body of the saved (Acts 2:47). Since Jesus gave his life for us, I have found a friend in Jesus.

***(2) SINCE HE FORGIVES US AND GIVES US A SECOND CHANCE,
I HAVE FOUND A FRIEND IN JESUS.***

"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 8:12). What a remarkable friend Jesus is! He will not give up on us when we make a mistake and make amends for such – He gives us a second chance. Perhaps the classic New Testament example of that about which we are speaking here is the apostle Peter. Peter, one of the "inner three," a close companion of Christ, strong defender of the truth and of Christ on several occasions, made a terrible mistake of forsaking Jesus and denying Him three times when Christ needed him the most. However, due to Peter's penitent attitude seen in that "he went out and wept bitterly" in Lk 22:62, and also his rededication to the cause of Christ as evidenced by assembling with the disciples in Jerusalem for prayer in Acts 1:13-14, Peter was given a second chance by Jesus. He was allowed to participate in preaching the first recorded Gospel sermon in Acts 2; in fact, the first 12 chapters of the book of Acts are primarily devoted to the activities of this apostle. In addition, Peter has the honor of being inspired to write the two New Testament books bearing his name.

Jesus also wants to give us a second chance in life whenever we fail Him through sin, but the choice is ours. It is based on our obeying God's second law of pardon through repentance, confession of sin, and prayer. Nehemiah 9:17 pictures God as "ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness..." "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9).

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much . . . Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (Jam. 5:16-20).

What if Jesus reacted like we sometimes react whenever we are offended, upset, and hurt by others? Even when people repent and offer apologies to us, we still may find it hard to forgive. We may harbor grudges and have evil thoughts toward those who have wronged us years after such wrongs have happened. In other words, sometimes we may not be willing to give another a second chance in our lives. The evil fruits of such attitudes manifest themselves in such actions as homicide, divorce, and in other ways. Otto the Great, a 10th century king of Germany once attended services at the cathedral of Frankfort. As he entered, he was approached by a man dressed in sackcloth. Pleading for mercy, the penitent individual fell prostrate at the King's feet. The King suddenly realized that it was his own brother Henry, who years before had severely wronged him. Remembering the ill treatment and insults he had received at his hand, he angrily pushed his brother out of his way with his foot. The religious services had already begun as he moved into the cathedral. Suddenly he heard the speaker read Matthew 18:21-22- "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." Conscience

stricken, the emperor returned to where his penitent brother lay sobbing. Raising him to his feet, he planted on his head a kiss of forgiveness. He was willing to forgive his brother and give Him a second chance! We are to forgive others even as Christ has forgiven us. Even worse, if we refuse to forgive, we won't be forgiven. "But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Mt. 6:15). Even when we do forgive, it's not so easy to forget; we are limited by our finite mind. But Jesus can both forgive and forget, since He is infinite. Thus we have a new beginning - another opportunity- a fresh start- a clean slate! This cleansing process is a continual one, based upon the precious and pure blood of our friend and upon our following His will. "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 Jn. 1:7). The Devil would like for us to think that we are beyond salvage. But if there is anything the Bible teaches, it is that our God is the God of a second chance. You are going to make mistakes. But the beauty of the gospel is that failures can be forgiven. Losing one battle with temptation does not mean that you have to lose the war. Since He forgives us and gives us a second chance, I have found a friend in Jesus.

I HAVE FOUND A FRIEND IN JESUS (2)

Mike McDaniel

(3) SINCE HE IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS, I HAVE FOUND A FRIEND IN JESUS.

Jesus is our true friend because He is impartial and without prejudice. "For there is no respect of persons with God" (Rom. 2:11). In the context of Acts 10, when Peter realized that the Gentiles also would partake of the blessings of the gospel, he said, in verses 34-35- "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

We see the unbiased attitude of Christ as recorded in Mark 2:15-17, "And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him. And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Jesus' eating with publicans and sinners was an atrocious act in the eyes of the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees who were wicked and sinful themselves. However, Jesus was no respecter of persons, and He knew that these too needed the message of salvation. No, Jesus did not condone their sin – He hated it – but He loved their souls. He did not shed his precious blood for one "elite" group, but for all mankind, regardless of race, social status, or financial position. Christ "tasted death for every man" (Heb. 2:9).

It is sad that prejudice exists in the world in the 21st century, but even sadder still to find it in the lives of some who profess to be Christians. In James 2:8,9 he warned, "If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors." To claim to be a true follower of Christ, while at the same time exhibiting partiality and bias towards those of a

different race, social status, or financial position, is a blatant contradiction. Let us constantly strive to purge prejudice from our lives and emulate the example of Christ. Since He is no respecter of persons, I have found a friend I Jesus.

(4) SINCE HE PROVIDES COMFORT AND CONSOLATION, I HAVE FOUND A FRIEND IN JESUS.

Jesus is our friend because of his ability to comfort and console troubled hearts. To his distressed and perplexed disciples, Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me" (Jn. 14:1). Jesus' disciples were troubled at this time for a number of reasons. (1) They learned that their King which they thought would set up an earthly kingdom and rule on earth, was about to die and leave them. (2) They learned that one of the twelve, Judas, would betray Christ. (3) They were told that even one of the "inner three," Peter, would deny Jesus. Jesus sought to alleviate their troubles by informing them of their prepared mansion which awaited them and of His returning one day. No doubt, these were comforting words!

Today there are those who are deeply distressed at this very moment, due to the loss of a spouse, relative or friend; some are grieving due to a prolonged and agonizing illness; some are pained due to family problems; others are tormented within themselves battling such problems as frustration, depression, guilt, fear, inferiority complexes, and drug addiction. Some will overcome, some will not. Are you troubled this day? These burdens can be much easier to bear and overcome with Jesus as your friend! As Paul said: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). Suffering man needs someone who can understand his suffering and at the same time be man's advocate with God. This is why Job cried out for a "daysman" in Job 9:33, someone to put his hand on both man and God. Christ fulfills this need! "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted" (Heb. 2:18). Because of Christ's suffering, man can believe that he will be raised from the dead (1 Cor. 15:22). Belief that one will live again after death is a great source of strength in the midst of suffering. Further, belief in the fact that Christ is on his throne in heaven is a source of strength to the child of God. "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:15-16). This loyal and dependable friend is ever present. "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). Since He gave his life for us, since He forgives us and gives us a second chance, since He is no respecter of persons, since He provides comfort and consolation, and due to many other characteristics that could be listed, I have found a friend in Jesus.

ARE WE HIS FRIEND?

How does one become a friend to Jesus and manifest that friendship toward him? Can Jesus call us His friends as He did His disciples in John 15:15. Many claim to be friends of Christ in the months of April and December, but a twice a year devotion does not a friend of Jesus make! Others profess a love of Christ throughout the year, while disregarding the authority of His word. They introduce into their worship man-made ideas and concepts. This is an "I'll worship as I please" religion condemned as "will worship" in Colossians 2:23. Still others render "lip-service" to Christ throughout the year, but their hearts are not in it. Theirs is a forced, mechanical worship which warms only the pew, and not their hearts. Their worship is "vain worship" (Mt. 15:9). The judgement day will be a shocking surprise for

many who thought they were friends of Jesus in this life (Mt. 7:21-23). Who is a true friend of Jesus? (Jn. 15:14). A friend of Christ is one who, from a heart of love and respect, OBEYS Christ through faith, repentance, confession and baptism in becoming his friend and who is devoted to maintaining that friendship (Rev. 2:10). What a noble thought and honored position to be considered his friend! What about you? Are you His friend?