

YOU ARE MY FRIENDS

John 15:11-17

Key Verse: 15:14

“You are my friends if you do what I command.”

Last week, we learned that Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. Jesus is the source of our lives. Apart from him, we cannot bear good fruit. May God help us to remain in Jesus through our sincere Bible study and prayer! In today’s passage, Jesus says that we are his friends if we do what he commands. Let’s think about what it means to be Jesus’ friends.

I. “MY JOY MAY BE IN YOU” (11)

Look at verses 10-11. *“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 have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”* Jesus teaches us that if we remain in his love by obeying his commands, we can have the joy that is complete. Now this is a wonderful thing to know. Many people think that living as a Christian is dull and it has no fun. But Jesus teaches us that we can have complete joy if we remain in his love.

The joy Jesus talks about here is obviously different from the worldly joy. When people talk about having joy, they usually mean fun and pleasure that satisfy the body and mind more than the soul. *The Joy of Cooking* used to be a best-selling book. We enjoy delicious food. I really enjoy a warm cup of coffee in the morning. *The Joy of Sex* was another best seller. Sex is a gift from God. But today people misuse it for momentary pleasure without love and commitment. It has become a breeding ground for all kinds of sin and a reason for broken family relationships. Many people are also very much into sports and entertainment. ESPN is the most lucrative cable TV network in recent decades. People try to fill the void in their lives by watching football or basketball games. Also many states in the U.S. now embrace some form of gambling in the name of entertainment and revenue source. However, there is one common problem with these kinds of joy. Worldly pleasure may please our body and mind for a while, but it is temporary. The joy of good food or sex, the joy of winning a jackpot, or the joy of watching our team win an important game does not last more than a few minutes or days. These kinds of joy often leave us with guilty feelings afterward. We cannot say that worldly joy is complete joy.

Even human love cannot give us the joy that is complete. The Samaritan woman in John 4 had tried to find the joy of life in human love. She searched for a prince charming that would make her live happily ever after. She was disappointed with her first husband. Still she didn’t give up. She married again and again in search of a man that could satisfy her desires. But she became thirstier each time, because no men could truly satisfy her. Wounded and resigned, and shunned by her own people, she would come to draw water alone in the heat of the day. She was thirsty and lonely. But our

Lord Jesus approached her humbly and offered her the living water welling up to eternal life. She finally found the true joy in Jesus. She threw away her water jar and went into the town to testify about Jesus.

Some young people study the word of God and are happy to meet Jesus the Savior. They want to commit their lives to the Lord, and live the blessed life as a disciple of Jesus. But they often are reluctant to commit their lives to Jesus because they are afraid of missing out on all the fun and pleasure of this world. What does Jesus say to them? Jesus did not say to his disciples, “I am sorry that you miss out on all the fun.” Instead, he promised the joy that is complete. Look at verse 11 again. *“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”* Worldly pleasure pleases our body and mind for a short while. But the joy that Jesus gives more than satisfies our physical body; it satisfies our soul.

In Greek, “joy” is “chara” (χαράν), which stems from “charis” (χαρις) which means “grace.” Joy and God’s grace are related. True joy comes from God, not from human activities. God gives us joy in our souls through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God gives us joy through the work of the Holy Spirit in our souls. Galatians 5:22-23 says, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”* The joy that God gives is not conditional upon our human situations. We can have joy even in the midst of trouble. The Book of Psalms contains many songs of joy and praise, even though the authors of the psalms were going through some tough times. They were often in distress or hardship, but their souls rejoiced. Psalm 21:6 says, *“Surely you have granted him eternal blessings and made him glad with the joy of your presence.”* This psalmist was filled with joy when he realized that God was with him. Psalm 119:111 says, *“Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.”* The psalmist was joyful when the words of life were dwelling in his soul. We need joy. Without joy, life is hard to endure. Therefore, we must know that joy dwells in our souls when we have a close fellowship with God. We can experience the complete joy every day by obeying his command, “Love one another.”

Joy also comes when we live for the glory of God. The early Christians were happy to accept Jesus as the Savior of the world. Soon, however, fiery persecutions came from the Jewish leaders and the Roman Empire. They had to give up their homes. They were separated from their family members. They had to run for their lives to foreign countries such as Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (1Pe 1:1). Many of them had to live in mountain caves, catacombs or underground cities. But the Apostle Peter did not sympathize with them humanly. Instead, he encouraged them to endure persecutions by faith. He told them persecutions would refine their faith like pure gold. 1 Peter 1:7 says, *“These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”* He also said, *“But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you”* (1Pe 4:13-14). The Christians were helpless and fearful before the persecutions. But Peter said, *“Rejoice to participate in the sufferings of Jesus Christ!”* Our Lord Jesus Christ suffered and died on the cross to save

us from our sins. Peter encouraged them to remember Jesus who suffered on the cross. He encouraged them to participate in the sufferings of Jesus by living a life of faith and mission, that is, by sharing the gospel of Jesus with others.

Again, true joy does not come from pleasing the physical body; it comes from God. We can have the complete joy in the love of our Lord Jesus. Let's read verse 11 once more. *"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."* The joy of this world is never complete. That's because no one can be truly satisfied until he comes to know the absolute love of God. The love of God is not shallow like human love. We must discover how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. When we remain in God's love, we can mature in love. We can also love others. When we remain in God's love, we can love our Bible students, our coworkers, our country and the world as well as our family. When we remain in Jesus' love, we can have complete joy.

Do you have joy in your soul? If not, please love God and love one another and also live for the glory of God. Then God will give you joy as the fruit of the Holy Spirit dwells in your hearts. Don't try to manufacture joy with your human effort. Come to Jesus and obey his new command, "Love one another." The result is not that you lose your freedom; rather, you really enjoy the true freedom and the true joy that God gives us.

II. "YOU ARE MY FRIENDS IF YOU DO WHAT I COMMAND" (12-15)

Look at verse 12. *"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you."* John Chapters 13-17 record Jesus' farewell discourses to his disciples before his crucifixion. In these "upper room dialogues," Jesus repeats his command: "Love each other." Why? His disciples were probably tired of listening to this command, "Love one another." But Jesus knew that they still did not love one another. We find no evidence in the gospels that his disciples loved one another. Simon Peter was a man with a great learning mind. When Jesus told him to put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch, he obeyed, saying, "I know that this isn't going to work. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." He was chosen as the top disciple of Jesus because of his learning mind. But there was one thing he did not learn from Jesus: to love one another. Instead, he considered his fellow disciples as his competitors. John and James looked noble. But they were fierce competitors. They did not love Peter. They even enlisted their mother to lobby for top cabinet positions in the kingdom of Israel which they thought Jesus would establish. Likewise, the other disciples did not love one another, let alone other people. This is the reason why Jesus repeated the command, "Love one another," many times. They had to learn how to love one another first in order to love others. They had to love one another first in order to understand the loving heart of God who sent his one and only Son Jesus to save the world. They had to love one another first to know the heart of Jesus who was going to die on the cross because he loved the sinful humanity.

Look at verse 13. *"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."* How could the disciples love one another? Jesus drew their attention to

what he was about to do. Jesus, the Creator God, did not come to this world to be a ruler or a boss; he came as a servant and as a friend. Jesus became a friend for all kinds of sinners in order to serve them. He was a friend to Levi the tax collector, Mary and Martha, Peter and John. Finally what did Jesus do for his friends? He laid down his life for them. How much did Jesus love them? How much does Jesus love us? Let us read verse 13 together: *“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”*

What a friend we have in Jesus! He gave his life for us. Now he wants us to be his friends. How can we be his friends? Look at verses 14-15. *“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.”* The disciples respected Jesus as their master and teacher. They knew how to behave as his students and servants. Given the culture of their time, they wouldn’t dare to call Jesus their friend. But Jesus told them: *“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.”* From the beginning, Jesus wanted to make them his friends, not his servants. Jesus wanted to make them friends so that they might somehow come to know that Jesus is God and that he would die on the cross for the sin of the world and rise again on the third day.

In the last part of verse 15 is the phrase, “his master’s business.” This is important. Jesus says a servant does not know his master’s business, but friends do. Jesus really wanted his disciples to know God’s will for Jesus, as well as for them. He wanted to share with them God’s business, that is, his world salvation plan, as friends share with each other their future plans. The Bible teaches that the Lord considers us as his friends and lets us know his business. Abraham was called God’s friend (2Ch 20:7; Isa 41:8). God shared with Abraham his plan to punish the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Ge 18:17). Likewise, Jesus considers us as his friends and shares with us his world mission business. He also tells us about his future plans for the world, including Jesus’ Second Coming to judge the living and the dead. Jesus is our Lord and Master. So he should call us servants. But he calls us friends. How comforting and reassuring to be chosen as Christ’s friends! *“You are my friends if you do what I command.”* To remain as Jesus’ friends, we must do what he commands. We must participate in his business of spreading the message of salvation to the world.

III. “YOU DID NOT CHOOSE ME, BUT I CHOSE YOU” (16-17)

Look at verses 16-17. *“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.”* Some people may say that they chose God. There is a danger in this, because one implication is that at any time they can reverse their choice; they can choose to abandon God. But Jesus says that we did not choose him, but he chose us. He appointed us to go and bear fruit that will last. Jesus chose us first. And this is true. Jesus made the first choice—to love and to die for us, to invite us to live with him forever. We can make the next

choice—to accept or reject his offer. Without his choice to come to this world as our Savior, we would have no choice to make.

Why does God choose his people? God chooses his people for his great purpose. He chose us to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last to eternity. He chose the Israelites as his people so that they could carry the word of God to all over the world as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:5-6). Similarly, Jesus chooses us to be his disciples to carry his message of salvation to the world (Mk 3:14; Mt 28:19). The Apostle Paul was an ambitious young man. By destroying the early church of Christ, he wanted to score big with the Jewish authorities. So he took the assignment to execute Stephan by stoning him to death. He arrested Christians left and right in Jerusalem. Then he obtained a letter from the Jewish leaders to go to another city to stamp out the Christian movement. But on the way to Damascus, the Risen Christ appeared to him personally. The Lord forgave his sins and chose him to be his instrument to carry the gospel to the Gentiles. Acts 9:15-16 says, *“Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”* It was God’s grace that called Paul to be his chosen instrument. St. Paul never forget this grace of Jesus. In all of his letters to Christians, he would testify that God had chosen him out of his grace and mercy.

It is important to know that we did not choose God, but that God chose us and set us apart to bear fruit that will last. Our Lord Jesus Christ chose each of us, as he chose St. Paul. When Paul was chosen, he realized that God chose him as a shepherd for the Gentiles. Because of his calling, he traveled throughout Asia Minor and Europe to carry the gospel of Jesus Christ, even though he had to suffer extreme hardships. Finally he even went to Rome as a prisoner in chains and taught the Bible to prison guards. If we don’t have a sense of God’s choosing us to bear fruit that will last, we have no meaning in life but working for three meals a day. But when we have a clear sense of God’s choosing each of us, we know why God put us here in this world at this point of time. We know what our mission is, and we know how to live in this world.

In today’s passage, we learned that in Jesus we can have the joy that is complete. May the Holy Spirit dwell in us so that we may have the complete joy in our souls! We also learn that Jesus wants us to be his friends by obeying his command to love each other. Jesus chose us to be his disciples to bear fruit that will last. May God help us to participate in the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ until he comes again in his glory!