**NO LONGER CALLED SLAVES BUT FRIENDS**

John 15:12-17

When I began to prepare this lesson my first thought was, “let me see if I can summarize some of these verses and maybe we can get through the rest of Chapter 15.” And then as I really delved into the passage I realized that v 12-17 were as far as we were going to get. They are chock full of important doctrinal truths that we cannot just lightly skim over. And so we will look closely at these 6 verses this morning.

Just briefly the setting – Jesus is talking to His eleven true disciples. Judas left earlier that evening and he’s out following through on his plan to betray Jesus. Later this same evening Jesus is going to be arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. That will set into motion the events of the next day, Friday. His arrest will take place somewhere in this vicinity of where Jesus is talking to His disciples. Jesus knows the end is near and He know His disciples need to hear some encouraging words from Him. Jesus is going to continue talking to these 11 disciples all the way thru Chapter 16.

Listen to Jesus’ words beginning in V 12: “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. [Jesus is repeating what He said earlier back in Ch 13, v 34, “love one another just as I have loved you.”] 13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if --- you do what I command you. 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. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. [this was our lesson last week] 17 These things I command you, so that you will… [here it is]… love one another.”

Loving one another must be pretty important. Jesus keeps emphasizing it throughout His discourse Ch 13 thru 16.

So have you ever had someone say to you, “I’ll let you be my friend if you do exactly what I say”? Well, that’s what Jesus is telling His disciples and us. READ John 15:14 again. Do you think obedience is important to Jesus? Absolutely. This whole passage that I just read begins and ends with a command from Jesus, “Love one another.” Who is “one another?” Us. Fellow believers in Jesus Christ.

First small group discussion question, take 5 minutes “Practically speaking, how do we show love for each other?”

After the groups share ask them “So grade yourself. How are you doing, how are we doing as a class on this command?

Our love for each other is to be modeled after Jesus’ love for us. And the ultimate act of His love for us is that the very next day He is going to die on the cross for our sins. He was not a victim. Jesus voluntarily laid down His life. That’s what He said back in John Ch 10: “I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.” Jesus went thru the terrible ordeal of the cross to redeem us, Galatians 3:13, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us…” He took our place on the cross. He paid our sin debt for us. Galatians 3:14 says the result of what Jesus did is “… so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.” What Jesus did on the cross provided the way – the ONLY way – for us to be saved. Quote John 3:16. Jesus loved us so much that He died for us. The greatest love of all!

So connecting v 12 and 13 together we should love each other to the extent that we would be willing to die for each other. Jesus modeled for us the kind of love we should have for our brothers and sisters in Christ, right? I’ll admit. That’s a tough one. I mean I really like you all a lot, I love you, but would I be willing to lay down my life for you? This is a convicting passage!

V 14, what does this verse mean? Our love for Jesus, our faith in Him is directly tied to our obedience. He actually teaches this idea in other places, but He says it again here.

Second small group discussion question, again take 5 minutes “Name some things that Jesus has commanded us to do – what you recall from reading and studying the Bible.

After the groups share ask, “So how are you doing on this one?”

OK so we are halfway through our passage – 3 verses down, 3 to go.

V 15, “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing.” At this point I feel compelled to correct a translation error here in the ESV. The Greek word that the ESV translates as “servant” is *doulos* , which literally means “slave.” A servant is a completely different Greek word. Just to give you an example of this – in Matt 20:26-27 Jesus tells His disciples, ESV, “But whoever would be great among you must be your servant [the Greek word is *diakonos* where we get our word deacon from, servant], and whoever would be first among you must be your *slave* [doulos, slave]. My point is that these are two completely different words in Greek and in English with completely different meanings. There are some similarities between a slave and a servant, but mostly difference. They are not interchangeable. Slaves are owned. Servants are free. Slaves have to do what their masters tell them. Servants are supposed to do what their bosses tell them. Slaves were bought with a price, redeemed. Servants were hired to serve for pay.

And yet for whatever reason the KJV, NKJV, NIV, ESV, RSV use the word “servant” for doulos here in this verse while the NASB, NLT, NET properly use the word “slave.” My opinion is that the social stigma and negative connotations of a slave (given our history, the atrocities of the slave trade) are politically incorrect. So because of social pressures they softened it a bit. That’s just my opinion. That’s the only explanation I can come up with. Am I just splitting hairs or is there a reason why Jesus uses the word “slave” rather than “servant” here in John 15:15? Well, let me ask you – were you bought with a price? Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6:20, “For you were bought with a price.” 1 Peter 1:18-19 says we were ransomed, redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ.” So then are we servants or slaves of Christ? Which is it? Slaves. So if you are going to be a slave what better master to have than Jesus Christ Himself!

So back to v 15, my point is that our relationship with Jesus is that of slave and Master for the reasons mentioned. We belong to Jesus. He is our Lord and Master. V 14, we do whatever He commands us. Right? This is all slave language. And yet here Jesus says that, even though we are technically slaves, He isn’t calling us “slaves.” Instead Jesus is calling us His “friends.” Then He briefly tells us why – “for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” One of the aspects of friendship that we can all understand and relate to is that you can intimately share your deepest thoughts and feelings and hopes and concerns with your true friends. Not your FB friends, or coworkers or casual acquaintances, but your real true friends. And that is what Jesus has been doing with His disciples here in these chapters. He’s pouring out His heart. Everything He shares is an outpouring of His love for them (John 13:1, “He loved them to the end”). They are His friends. And if we follow Him and do His will, then we are also His friends.

Which brings us to v 16 and we get into a subject that confuses and troubles a lot of Christians. Jesus says this: “You [the 11 disciples and us His followers] did not choose Me [Jesus] but I chose you, and appointed you [I gave you a job to do] that you would go and bear fruit…” I chose you for a reason. Which was last week’s lesson… we should abide, remain in Jesus, totally depending on Him for everything and when we do we will bear fruit, exemplify the character of Christ, do the things Christ wants us to do. We’ll have the right actions and right attitudes. And when we do this, we receive all the benefits that go with it. And one of these benefits which was mentioned in Ch 14, v 13-14: “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” This is a wonderful promise that He is reminding those of us who follow Him about.

So this idea that Jesus chooses us gets into the whole predestination issue. It can be a divisive issue and my intention as I teach this passage is not to get you stirred up or angry (example of my sister’s church).

Like a lot of Christians I struggled with this doctrine and my struggle led me to the following conclusion: The older I get, the more strongly I embrace the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. This includes the idea that He has predestined the course of history. I see evidence of God at work all around me and throughout the world. As a Christian looking back on my own conversion experience at age 10, I can see that, had it not been for the conviction and prompting of the Holy Spirit, I would not have been convicted to follow Christ. So I fully acknowledge that God chose me first before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20) and then I chose Him second (in April of 1968).

So that is where my struggle on this doctrinal issue has led me, just so you know where I stand. It’s good to wrestle with the tensions found in God’s word. They are not always easy to resolve. There are a lot of passages in the Bible that are not easy to understand and a lot of passages are widely misunderstood.

The last verse, v 17 Jesus repeats His command of v 12 “that you love one another.” I get the distinct impression that this is really important to Jesus. So in closing, by way of application, maybe we ought to examine our own lives and ask ourselves, “how can we do a better job of loving one another?” Let’s start with our own class. Suggestions, comments?

Sing, “This is my commandment that you love one another”