

05/01/11

## Friend of God #1 – An Outrageous Possibility

- Have you ever been surprised that someone was willing to, or even wanted to be your friend?...
  - I'm not asking that in the FaceBook friending kind of way...
  - I'm talking about someone who you would consider a valuable friend today....or maybe someone the Lord used at a different time in your life...but all of it started with genuine surprise on your part...
- when I was finishing 6<sup>th</sup> grade, our family moved from Gary to Merrillville...which meant among other things a change in schools...
- then because of construction in that new school district, I ended up attending four different schools in the course of five years...that was a challenging time for me...
  - we kept attending our same church in Gary even after moving to Merrillville...where Pastor Goode pastored before he and Mrs. Goode came here to Lafayette...
  - they moved down here when I was 13 years old...but in his last couple of years in Gary, Pastor Goode hired a young youth pastor named Ron Allchin...
  - Pastor Allchin did a great job with the youth group but I was very shy and honestly, I was afraid to attend youth group meetings because I didn't know anyone...
  - but Pastor Allchin was working with the older teens on outreach and friendliness...and several of those kids from the youth group started doing everything they could to get me to start coming....
  - I can remember Frank Hall, who was several years older than me...but he would call week after week and ask me to come, and I had every excuse in the book...but he kept pursuing me...
  - it's funny how all these things come back around, but one of our members Scott VanDerAa' has an aunt named Beth – and she too was several years older than me...but she had a car, and she would drive around and pick up all kinds of kids and take them to youth group meetings...and she and the rest of the crowd would come to my house and practically drag me to those meetings...
  - to this day I can picture that car because of what it represented to me...a group of people who were willing to be, and who even wanted to be my friend...that had an incredibly influential impact on my life...
- when I went out to Bible College, I knew very few people on campus...and it was pretty lonely those first few weeks...being 700 miles away from home wasn't as easy as I thought it would be...
- and I met a guy from Elkhart named Sam Barfell...some of you recognize that name because Sam is our Regional Administrator for the Association of Christian Schools International...he just led an all-day training seminar for the education committee at our school which the guys told me they really appreciated...Sam and I eventually became college roommates...
  - but he knew a lot of people at college...he was a good athlete...
  - and I won't go into the exact details of how we met...but we just hit it off and became great friends to this day...
  - the kind of person you can go for months and not have a reason to talk and then pick up the conversation down the line as if you never missed a beat...
  - but I can remember being surprised that he wanted to be, or was willing to be my friend...
- Sam is the one who introduced me to my wife Kris at the beginning of my sophomore year...

- at BBC, you couldn't have a car your freshman year...
  - and I had a Christian service assignment at a little country church on a gravel road about an hour north of campus...so I rode up with an upper-classman who had a car...but I had wondered what would happen if I could go up on Saturdays and just do some door-to-door visitation up and down that road...
  - so I told the Lord that if I would be able to buy a car the summer after my freshman year, I would use it to do that kind of work on Saturdays...
  - and sure enough that's what happened...so the first couple of weekends I did that by myself...which was fine but kind-of lonely...
  - that's where my wife Kris comes into the story...because Sam had just introduced us right at the end of my freshman year...and I knew she was way out of my league..
  - by then Kris was living back in Elkhart...but about a month into my sophomore year she was going to be out at BBC for the weekend...
  - so being the hopeless romantic that I am...I asked Kris if she would be willing to come with me on Saturday to go on door-to-door visitation on this old gravel road...
  - that was literally our first date...
  - and I can remember how nice it was to not be doing that alone...and how amazed I was that she willing to be, and wanted to be my friend...
- I could illustrate that in all sorts of ways now...I don't believe in name dropping, but I have the privilege of being friends today with many people that I would have never believed would have any interest or willingness...in some cases now I look back and I'm not even sure how those friendships started...but I'm sure glad they did...
- I've said all of that to encourage you to think of similar stories in your life...
    - where you would say of someone who is very important to you today...you know at the time, I was surprised that that person was willing to, and even wanted to be my friend...
    - do several people come to mind like that for you?...I hope so...
- now, why am I raising this issue?...it's because do you realize, that in a very real sense...that is also true of your relationship with the Lord...it is possible to be...a friend of God...
- that's what I'd like to talk to you about this morning...**An Outrageous Possibility**...
- with that in mind, please open your Bible to James chapter 2...page 178 on the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
  - our church's theme this year is **Living Life Together**...
    - we're focusing on the issue of being connected...being a place that truly functions the way God has designed His church to be...as the...family of God...
    - we've studied that in different ways already this year...
    - we began with a survey of the book of Exodus...because that's a book that explains the way God called out and developed a group of people who were to be His visible representatives on this earth...
    - then the last seven weeks, we've had a series called **Friend Request**...where we've studied biblical principles together about how to develop and cultivate godly friendships with one another...
  - this morning we're switching gears rather dramatically...because between now and the Community Picnic on July 3<sup>rd</sup>...we want to talk about what it means to be a **Friend of God**...
    - what does that mean, and what does it look like in practical terms?...
  - now, a couple of things about these upcoming weeks...

- as you know, there are several holidays coming up...
- Mother's Day next week... Memorial Day... Father's Day... 4<sup>th</sup> of July...
- and while Friend of God is going to be our overall theme, I want you to know that we are putting more effort than ever to make these upcoming special days ones that you could easily invite a friend or loved one to attend...
- we want to create natural occasions for you to invite loved ones and others the Lord has placed around you to church... and I hope you'll prayerfully consider doing that...
- now, I know you might say in turn to that – well, I would do that if I thought we would have a comfortable place for all of us to sit when we arrived...
- that is a fair point... I was glad for the many people who were in church last Sunday – I'm not sure we served each and every one of them well...
- but I want you to know that we are putting the finishing touches on a plan to start a fourth live service beginning in mid-August...
  - it will have live worship... and live teaching... I think we may have come up with a creative way to serve more people without having to construct a bigger auditorium...
  - if the plan works, it is even expandable to a 5<sup>th</sup> service if we ever needed that...
  - my point is – I would encourage you to be inviting those around you to church and we'll do everything we can now and in the days ahead to serve them well...
- something else about this series – several of our pastors are going to be speaking in the upcoming weeks...
  - we're doing that for a lot of reasons... I am very thankful for our staff... and I believe it is best for our church family to hear from a variety of voices, and be exposed to the gifts God has given them...
  - I also have a fair amount of travel in the latter part of May, so this should all work out well...

- now, this morning let's turn our attention to this matter of **An Outrageous Possibility**...  
 - **read James 2:14-26**...

- now, if you know your Bible... you might say, boy Steve—you just stepped into a theological minefield for sure...
  - and in some ways that's true... its verses like this that led Martin Luther to conclude that the book of James was an epistle of straw... he did not know how to reconcile these words with what the apostle Paul said about the very same person, and the very same issue...
  - we're going to wrestle that through this morning... because honestly, Martin Luther could not have been any more wrong on this particular point... and comprehending why takes us a long way down the road of both understanding and applying what it truly means to be a friend of God...

- let's think this morning about **Three characteristics of a friend of God**.

### **I. A Friend of God Cultivates Productive Faith.**

- it's important to remember that everything we just read is:

#### **A. Written against the backdrop of "dead faith".**

- you may know that this book was written to a Jewish audience...
- **James 1:1 - James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.**
- you also may know that James was a brother, humanly speaking, to Jesus...

- well, how frequently did Jesus speak about people who said they believed in God but did not have a corresponding lifestyle that gave evidence of the genuineness of their faith?...
- the answer to that question is – all the time...
- that was one of our Lord's most frequent discussions...
- **Matthew 3:7-8 - But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance;**
- in other words, saying that you believed in God apart from a resultant changed lifestyle was a farce...it was simply empty words...
- **Matthew 7:21 - "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.**
- we could multiple references like that for a long time this morning...
- now just to be sure we're being clear...salvation in both the old and new testament has always been by grace alone...through faith alone...in whatever truth God had revealed up to that moment...
- so we are not in any way saying that any person was ever saved by his/her works...
- like Paul told Titus...
- **Titus 3:5-7 - He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life.**
- now, you might say – but what about the passage we just read in James – we'll get there and that will be thoroughly explained...
- but let's be sure we're moving logically through the text...
- the backdrop here is the many men and women who want to say they believe in God but whose lifestyles do not have any evidence of a resultant changed life...what that means is...

## **B. Not all supposed faith is saving faith.**

- **James 3:19 – You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.**
- the point is – the biblical gospel is more than intellectual assent of certain divine truths...
- there must be repentance...an acknowledgement of one's' sin...and a turning around of heart and life to not only allow Christ's blood to cover that sin and wash it away...but a corresponding desire to forsake sin and live in a way that honors Christ as one's Lord and King...
- James point is – that kind of saving faith will produce genuine works...
- a couple of quick take-aways...
  - that in part explains what we did last Sunday...it was no surprise that we had more people here last week than ever before...that was expected...
  - but we could have simply talked about new life, and spring time, and rebirth, etc...and skipped entirely over the cross...and our sin...and our need for repentance...It could have been a much lighter service...

- that would have been a terrible mistake in our minds...
- because a presentation of the gospel without an emphasis on sin, and repentance, and the need for shed blood, the death of Christ, and a commitment to following Him as Lord is not the biblical gospel...
- and in the long run – what looks like faith is not biblical faith and it will therefore not produce genuine works...
- and it confuses people who then think they're followers of Christ when they're not...
- there's also implication here to the parents in our church of young children...
- please be sure when you are talking to your child about Christ that you have spent plenty of time first talking to them about sin...about the law of God that has been broken because we all have a rebellious heart beating in our breasts...
  - simply asking your child if he/she wants Jesus in their heart is not biblical faith...
  - what child would not want Jesus to live in their heart?... Not saying we need to make it harder than it needs to be... but we ought to make it thorough...
- now, what else does James emphasize here...

### **C. Productive faith is compassionate.**

- **James 2:15-16 - If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that?**
  - and what answer does James expect?...nothing – no use at all...
  - and correspondingly...for a person who does know Christ...for a person who has living faith...one of the ways you'll be able to tell that is their level of compassion for people who are hurting...
  - we had an interesting example of that last month...
    - I think it is fair to say that we are constantly receiving requests to take special offerings for things around here...
    - and the general answer when those requests come from outside is...quite honestly...no...
    - the average person here is already tithing sacrificially from their income and in many cases, have grown to do a much higher percentage of their income than that...
    - then we ask people to consider giving above and beyond that to support Vision of Hope, and the counseling center, special missionary projects, and our seminary, and our school, and our community center...
    - and so we very seldom ask our people to give to special offerings, or love offerings...
    - well, several weeks back---we received word that one of our missionaries, Ken Davis who trains church planters at Baptist Bible Seminary had lost the car he was given by the school to go visit the various church plants around the northeast because the school's cash flow was tight and they had to sell all their school owned cars...
    - so we asked you to consider giving a special offering to Ken and his wife Sharon so they could continue that ministry...
    - just as we were receiving that offering, the Tsunami hit Japan...and I became aware that Yukiko Waldrop, one of our members, had family in that general area and contact with local church pastors...
    - we felt like we needed to let our church family know about that...

- and after giving in an incredibly generous fashion to Ken/Sharon Davis...our church family turned right around and gave nearly \$20,000 to relief and outreach work in Japan...
- and you know that I talk very little about that topic...but that's one of the things I love about our church...people don't talk a lot...they do a lot...especially for those who are hurting as a means of proclaiming the Biblical gospel of Jesus Christ...that's what friends of God do...
- that's productive faith...and you know I didn't just say that you earn your way to heaven by giving money—that would be the worst kind of error imaginable...
  - but if we truly have repented of our sin and come to God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to the Scriptures alone, to the glory of God alone...it will change everything...including the way we handle our money...
- by the way, I want you to know that we will never take advantage of that...
  - and you may be wondering where we are on the development of the two ministry centers, one near the Purdue Campus...and the other here on our campus...
  - and the answer is...we have a new signed agreement with the owners of Smitty's...
  - they are continuing to deal with the environmental concerns that have to be handled before we can close...
  - but we're operating on the assumption that we will purchase that property and at least build a student ministry center and a biblical counseling center there...
  - and that will involve launching a three year capital campaign for 2012-2014...
    - and while this is a decision that the church family will eventually have to make when we have a greater picture of the costs...
    - it's likely that we will attempt to do only the project at Purdue in this next cycle...
    - and the reason for going that direction if that's what we end up doing is that we never want to take the fact that men and women are exercising productive, living faith in their financial lives for granted...

- now, what else can we see from this text?

## II. A Friend of God Acts on the Word.

- what are we to do with...

### A. The example of Abraham.

- James says clearly in verse 21 – here's an example of what I'm saying about living faith...our father Abraham...
- **James 2:21-22 - Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;**
- now, if you know your Bible—you might say – what?...that would appear to directly contradict...

### B. The teaching of Paul.

- **Romans 4:1-3 - What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."**
- and you might say – wait a minute... it appears they are coming to opposite conclusions...
- they are not coming to opposite conclusions at all...and there's a very important point to be made is this...

### C. Understanding the balance.

1. **Paul is speaking about when Abraham placed his faith in God (Genesis 15). James is talking about when Abraham demonstrated the genuineness of his faith years later in his willingness to obey God and offer his son Isaac (Genesis 22).**
2. **The word justify in the Bible (dikaioo) can mean either acquittal or vindication (proof). The moment we repent of our sin and trust Christ as Savior and Lord, we are instantaneously and absolutely forgiven (acquitted) of our sin on the basis of God's grace through faith. After we are saved, we have opportunities to prove our faith (to justify its validity) by obeying Christ's commands.**
3. **James is dealing with the means of salvation in this passage, but the outcome of salvation.**
4. **"Justification by faith" involves our standing before God, "justification by works" involves our standing before man.**

- now, where does all of that lead?...

- Abraham could be called a friend of God in this passage and other places in the Scripture because he acted on whatever God's Word told Him to do...
- when God called him and told him to believe his promises for his salvation in Genesis 12 and 15...Abraham believed God...he was His friend...and he was justified before God...his faith saved him...
- and much later, as a believer...as a saved individual...God called upon him to do something hard...to trust Him with the life of His own son...and Abraham believed God...he was His friend again...and he was justified before man...his works were an essential by-product of his genuine faith...

- so where does that leave people like you and me?...hopefully understanding that...

### **III. A Friend of God Never Starts that Way.**

#### **A. We are born as enemies of God.**

- **Ephesians 2:1-3 - And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.**
- that's for the person who might think – well, I've always been a friend of God...
- that is not the testimony of the Scripture...we're all born on the wrong side of the tracks and it is impossible to be reconciled to a holy God apart from the sufficient blood of Christ...
- and the amazing thing is – just as God pursued this kind of friendship with Abraham...God desires that kind of friendship with you...
- but what about the person who would say – but my past is too messed up...I'm too far gone?...
- who's the other human example given in this passage?...Rahab the harlot...

#### **B. Christ's blood is sufficient enough to make even the vilest sinner His friend.**

- **Romans 5:20** - ...where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

**C. Implications to those who are not yet His friend.**

- if you've never trusted Christ as Savior and Lord – essentially responding to His friendship request the way we've described this morning...I would urge you to do so...
- Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him as righteousness...you could put yourself in that exact same position this am

**D. Implications to those who are Christ's friend but want to strengthen the relationship.**

- you might say – Steve, I've trusted Christ...but I wish that friendship was stronger...
  - I need to ask you this...what about the issue of obedience to the Word?...
  - what about the issue of works that demonstrate your faith?...
- there's a crucial phrase in all of this...
- **v. 23 – and the Scripture was fulfilled...**
- when you like Abraham and his son Isaac, look at God's Word even when it's hard and say – I am going to obey what God's Word has said – those are the thoughts, and the actions of a friend...
- **John 15:14 - You are My friends if you do what I command you.**
- and if you say – but that's hard...that's part of what strengthens the friendship...
- saying to Christ – Lord, I want to obey you...but its hard...would you please help me obey you...
- **Galatians 2:20 - “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.**
- there's nothing quite like a friendship where two people are working together to accomplish a common goal...
- I think it's important for us to end with a few...

**E. Implications to those who have messed up.**

- we have to be honest with the Scripture...
- Abraham had great faith...but he didn't have perfect faith...
- Abraham didn't wait for God to fulfill His promise with Isaac and instead had a son named Ishmael with his wife's handmaiden Hagar...
- that was a significant lapse of faith that God's Word doesn't airbrush out of the Bible...
- there's some great news there...
- obedience is a direction of life...not perfection...
- **James 2:23 - The Scripture was fulfilled which says, “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,” and he was called the friend of God**