

## YOU ARE MY FRIENDS

John 15:11-27  
Key verse 15:14

"You are my friends if you do what I command."

Thank God for the second master class on leadership this past weekend featuring the Word from Luke's Gospel, Paul's letters, and presentations on Enlightenment and 19th century theology. The nine lecturers proved to be righteous and blameless workers before God by their efforts, rightly dispensing the word of truth. All participants learned the Christ-centered faith of Apostle Paul, who struggled throughout his life as a spiritual father for the churches, to establish and defend faith in the crucified Christ.

In John 15:1-10, Jesus promised his disciples, if they remain in him and his word remains in them, to bear much fruit. We could deepen our vine-branches-relationship with Jesus through this word and pray to remain in Jesus and glorify God through good fruits of life.

Jesus' conversation with his disciples took place in the upper room in Jerusalem, a few hours before he was arrested and crucified. Jesus knew what would happen to him. He had spoken to them about the relationship between him, the vine, and them, the branches. He had given them his commands, saying, "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love." What else could he say to them?

In today's passage, we learn that he called them his friends. They were not just servants, but friends and co-workers whom he had chosen and appointed to go and bear lasting fruit. Let us understand what it means to be Jesus' friend and pray that we and the young students and co-workers of

the next generation will go as Jesus' friends and bear lasting fruit for world mission.

### 1. I have chosen you to go and bear fruit (11-17)

Look at verse 11, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." Jesus had exhorted his disciples to remain in him and in his love. Now he announced that then his joy would remain in them and their joy would be complete. At that time, the disciples were greatly distressed. Jesus had announced the betrayal and then said that he would leave them. He had predicted to Peter that the latter would deny him three times. The idea of being without Jesus made them feel insecure and infinitely sad. But Jesus spoke first of the Counselor and now also of joy: "That my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." How could Jesus, who was himself in the greatest distress, have joy? Jesus does not talk about the fleeting joy of good conditions, but true and spiritual joy. All people seek joy. People who do not know God seek joy in pleasure by pursuing their desires. Others seek joy in self-realization, whether through success, money, fame, autonomous freedom, power, or knowledge. Still others seek joy in idleness and tranquility. However, no matter how much they enjoy themselves, self-actualize in all things, or rest day and night, they find no true joy. For these deceptive pleasures quickly disappear, making people even more empty and joyless. Acts tells us of Saul, whose joy was to be more righteous than everyone else. When Stephen, the witness of Jesus, was stoned, Saul tri-

umphed and took pleasure in it. But shortly thereafter that joy was gone and his anger was greater than before, so that he snorted against the Christians with threats and murders and sought to destroy the church (Acts 8:3; 9:1). But when Saul himself gave his life to Christ, the joy of Jesus came into his heart, which no one could take from him. Even when he was falsely accused and put in chains, he had perfect joy and wrote from prison to the believers in Philippi (Phil 4:4), "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

Biblically, joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22). God Himself is our joy (Ps 43:3). God's admonitions are a particularly great joy. Psalm 119:111 says, "Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart." The Word of God, which admonishes and rebukes God's people and leads them to repentance, is a delight of the heart for them. Finally, it is also the joy of Jesus' disciples to be able to share in Christ's suffering. Luke 6:22,23 say, "Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets."

The disciples indeed had every reason to rejoice: they had Jesus, his words of eternal life, and his mission. In obedience to his world mission command, they experienced perfect joy. Apostle Peter therefore encouraged Christians in dispersion and persecution (1 Pet. 4:13): "But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."

The life of faith is a life of joy. The joy of the world is nothing. A young woman was lured by the world's promises of joy while the life of faith seemed unattractive to her. As soon as she came of age, she wanted to get away from her parents, who are serving the work of God, and from the community of brothers and sisters in faith, following Jesus

through many tribulations. Through Bible study however, she realized that Jesus did not want to take away her joy, but to give her complete joy. She was baptized and received the joy of Jesus. Now she experiences joy in studying God's Word and cooperating for His redemptive work. Jesus' joy will remain in her, and her joy will become complete. Do you already know the joy of Jesus? The joy of Jesus remains in us and becomes perfect in the life of discipleship. Let us live a life of fellowship with Jesus, studying His Word, and participation in His sufferings with perfect joy.

Let's look at verse 12. Jesus here repeats his command from chapter 13: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." In verse 17 he says again, "This is my command: Love each other.." Jesus was very concerned that the disciples obey his command. Their new life was no longer a life of selfishness, but a life of mission. Their mission was to love one another as Jesus loved them. How did Jesus love them? Verse 13 says, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." Jesus laid down his life for his friends. He gave himself completely for them, even to the point of death on the cross, that's how much he loved them. Jesus' disciples are called to love as Jesus loved them, and also to lay down their lives for their friends. 1 John 3:16 says, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."

Now let's read verse 14, "You are my friends if you do what I command." When we hear "command and obey," we first think of the relationship of an officer to his subordinate soldiers, or of a master to his servant. But Jesus here calls his disciples "my friends." He calls them friends because he made known to them all that he heard from his Father. Verse 15 says, "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." A friend is much more than a servant. Of course, Jesus' disciples were servants. He was their lord and master. His word was a command to them. They were bound to obey unconditionally. That is why they called themselves "servants of Christ Jesus" in their letters. But they were much more than servants, namely Jesus' friends. A servant does not know what his master is doing, but Jesus had told his disciples everything. He had revealed to them the whole plan of God's salvation: that he is the bread of life, the light of the world and the resurrection and the life, the meaning of his suffering and death on the cross, his victory over the power of death and his glorious return. He had also revealed to them that it was God's will that the gospel of the kingdom of God be preached among all nations and that all nations be discipled. He had given them God's words so that their spiritual eyes would be opened and they could see God's hope and God's vision. They were his friends and co-workers. After his resurrection, they testified to the whole counsel of God and spoke to the people all the words of life. They called people everywhere to repent, obey Jesus, and become Jesus' friends. Most of all they continued Jesus' ministry of World Mission through making disciples.

"You are my friends" reminds us of Abraham. When God called Abraham, he gave him a commandment and a promise. He revealed to him that he wanted to make him a great nation and a blessing to all generations on earth. God also told him what would happen to his descendants. Abraham could not understand God's plan well at first. His main interest was to have a son. However, God kept giving him his promise. Abraham remained in fellowship with God and listened to his word and repented and grew in faith. When God made known to him how great the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was, Abraham could not remain silent. He heartily and persistently interceded and asked God for his mercy, and God heard his prayer. At that time Abraham was 99 years old and still had no son. Yet he

knew God's plan and was therefore called "God's friend" (James 2:23).

To be a friend of Jesus means to know the counsel of God and to cooperate with God. Christians are not employees. Employees remain with their employer as long as they benefit from it. They are relatively indifferent to the plan and will of the principal. Rather, they pursue their own plan. When the opportunity arises, they resign and leave. Christians, on the other hand, are friends of Jesus. They know the counsel of God. They no longer have their own plan, but do everything so that the Lord's plan may be fulfilled. They suffer with him and rejoice with him. They do not need to be driven and motivated again and again because the hope and vision of Jesus is in their hearts. According to verse 16, Jesus has chosen and appointed them to go and bear fruit, and their fruit will remain and God will hear their prayer in Jesus' name. In other words, he chose them for world mission, and for this purpose he made them his friends.

A young man received God's calling with Genesis 12:2, "You will be a blessing." He made a decision to co-work in the campus mission. Then he unexpectedly experienced many challenges: in his studies, at work, in his house church, in raising children, among Bible students. But he could not give up the call as a shepherd, Bible teacher and co-worker because God's promise is in his heart. Even when there was a bereavement in his family, he served the discipleship meeting and worship service with sense of ownership and responsibility. He knows the will of God, who wants to make him a blessing for all generations on earth. He is one of those who in our time participate in the suffering of Jesus and write history of faith as his friends.

Many young people of our time suffer from the lack of relationships. They are distant like outsiders, passive like spectators, or concerned with their own advantage like employees. Jesus says to them, "You are my friends." At the 2019 Global Leadership Empowerment Forum, we studied the five

books of Moses. For some of the young leaders, it was their first time to explore these books in context in this way. God worked in them and opened their spiritual eyes to His love for His people and to His sovereign will for world missions according to Exodus 19:5, 6. They repented of their own self-centered life plans and decided to grow as global spiritual leaders through serious Bible study and spiritual collaboration.

God reveals His sovereign will to us through Bible study. We are University-Bible-Fellowship, therefore, as friends of Jesus and friends to one another, we are to know the sovereign will of God. He spoke His word to us just in the time of outward tribulation. We studied Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 37 and Nehemiah 2 and realized that God fulfills His work through the holy stumps. God wants His people to devote themselves to intensive Bible study and disciple-making in an age marked by godless humanism, so that the dry bones will come alive and stand up on their feet as a vast army of God. He wants to bless the cooperation to rebuild the broken walls. Realizing this, we began to form one-to-one Bible study teams with the prayer that God would raise up 100,000 Bible teachers and 5 million prayer workers for world missions. We also started praying and working for Germany and Europe to be used again as a shepherd nation and missionary-sending continent, establishing three mission bases in Istanbul, Cairo and Dubai, to change the countries of the Middle East into a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Jesus' burning heart for world mission ignites our numb and obdurate heart, so that as His friends we serve God's work of world campus mission wholeheartedly, with all our strength and all we have.

Let us ask ourselves; How do we react when we hear the prayer topics? Do we remain indifferent, saying, "God still hasn't given me what I asked for"? Or are we friends of Jesus? When we hear about the struggle of high school students, like the preparation for high school graduation of Josua, Samuel, David and Noah for this

year and Sarah and Peter for next year, we cannot remain indifferent, but may go and intercede for them from our hearts, not only for them to do well in their high school graduation, but for them to grow as global leaders, friends of Jesus and co-workers of God.

We are Jesus' friends. As his friends, God's sovereign will and plan according to Ezekiel 37:10, Nehemiah 2:17, and our personal key word ought to burn in our heart, so we may glorify and bear lasting fruit as Jesus' disciples and as a spiritual headquarters for world mission.

## 2. If the world hates you (18-27)

Let's read verse 18: "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first." Jesus was persecuted from the beginning when He chose to obey the will of God as the Son of God. Jesus' friends are also hated. Verse 19 says, "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you." The friends of Jesus are hated and persecuted because of the name of Jesus by those who do not know God (21).

Let's read verses 22-24: "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father." Jesus is saying here that the hatred of the world is a reaction to the work of God. The world should rejoice at Jesus' coming. But because the people of the world do not want to repent of their sin, they hate Jesus. Jesus was accused, slandered, judged and condemned for no reason. Jesus quotes Psalm 69:5, "They hate me without cause." Let's read verses 26 and 27: "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from

the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning." We cannot avoid the hatred of the world. But the Holy Spirit bears witness to God's work. And the disciples are also witnesses to what Jesus did. They testified that Jesus was innocently condemned, but that God raised him from the dead and made him the author of eternal salvation for all who obey him. Jesus' disciples are not only Jesus' friends, but also his witnesses in the world.

God's work through Bonn UBF is the work of God through a house church that has given itself wholeheartedly to making disciples by living together for the past 40 years. When they obeyed God without ifs and buts, this work became a work that the world could not bear.

But the co-workers who had been there from the beginning were not ashamed, but testified to God's mighty work in the midst of the hostile world, encouraging many to become disciples of Jesus.

Today we could learn to be Jesus' friends. As Jesus' friends we cooperate with God for His sovereign will, the world mission. God has chosen us as and appointed us to be spiritual headquarters for spiritual renewal in 1,700 colleges in Europe and for world mission even in the Muslim countries. Through early morning prayer, forming one-on-one Bible study teams, making disciples by living together and establishing mission bases, let us obey Jesus' world mission command and bear lasting fruit.