

Sermon Series: "I Am" Part 4
"The Father's Friendship"
Pastor Dale Campfield - January 23rd, 2011

Intro:

Matt 28:19 "Go and make disciples of all nations..."

ECC Process of Discipleship: Making an IMPACT...To Love...To Grow...To Serve

We have 3 priorities – To love...which is expressed in our Sunday morning celebration and connection groups. To grow...which is expressed in our Path to Discipleship. To serve...which is expressed in our daily lives in the places we live, work and play; as well as through the local church. The vision of E.C.C. is to gather together weekly for corporate worship, loving God and each other; then to come together in small Connection Groups for discipleship and fellowship, and are regularly involved in reaching out to others with the love, acceptance, and forgiveness of Jesus Christ through community outreach. To Love...To Grow...To Serve!

Intro:

Today we continue with our sermon series entitled: "I Am".

The Goal of this series: To fall more in love with who God is, becoming a passionate follower of Christ, desiring to walk in obedience to His teachings.

How will we do this: By Learning Who the Father Is.

Jesus asks the question of Peter...

Mark 8:29

"Who do you say that I am?"

Let me ask you again: "Who do you say that He is?"

Today's Sermon Title: "The Father's Friendship"

In this world, there numerous types of friendships. There is a faucet friendship that people turn on and off. There is fake friendship wherein folk will fake you out when you need them most. There is a fair weather friend that will remain so long as the weather is fair. There are get-over and get under friends. These are all worldly friendships. But in our text today, Solomon introduces us to a unique friend, that will stick closer than a brother. Let us consider the meaning of a genuine friendship. Friendship is the covenantal binding together of two people. Friendship is always preceded by self-giving. The first friend in the bible was God Himself. The first gift of the first friend was another friend. It was God who determined from the beginning that "it was not good for man to be alone." He then made woman to be a friend of man, from man. Friendship is based

on the agape' or what is more aptly called the biblical love. It is the love of God that is shed abroad in the believer's heart. Love is a desire for and a delight in the well-being of the one loved; leading to an active and a self-sacrificing effort of on their behalf. God Himself is the very essence of friendship. The God-head is a perfect unity, wherein God is in relationship with Himself. A friend is someone you can be yourself with. A friend is someone who knows your weakness and respect your strength. Abraham Lincoln said: "The better part of one's life consists of his friendships." Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "The only way to have a friend is to be one." A friend is one who is a source of sunshine when you are under the weather. A friend is one who believes in you, when you cease to believe in yourself. A friend is a source of celebration when you feel that there is nothing to celebrate. A friend is one who answers your call before you call. Friendship is of two categories. It is first vertical or God-ward and second horizontal or a reaching outward. Friendship thrives upon sacrifice. You can give without love but you cannot love without giving. True friendship is when two friends can walk in opposite directions, and yet remain side by side. A friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out. A friendship with Jesus is truly the only unsinkable-ship. That is the friendship God wants to have with us!

We all have friends in life; but there is a friend in God that all of us can have.

Proverbs 18:24

"There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

You may be thinking this morning; how can God possibly want to be my friend? I'm a loser. I've got sin in my life? I'm nothing compared to God. It's like thinking, "Why would the President of the United States want to be my friend? Why would someone like Brad Pitt want to be my friend when I don't match up to his ways? It's easy to think we're not worthy of be a friend of God.

But, who was Jesus a friend to in the Bible? Was it the people in charge? No. Was it the scribes and pharasees? No. Was it the "popular" people of the day? No.

Who is this friend?

Matthew 11:19 gives us the answer –

"The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners."'"

Zacchaeus, Matthew, Mary Magdalene and the woman taken in adultery all had a personal encounter with the Friend of sinners. They were never the same again. This can be your experience too.

Some people are very reluctant to develop new relationships, because of past experiences, but while our relationships in this life can cause our greatest grief, pain and sorrow they can also be the source of our greatest joy and pleasure and without question such a relationship is one that we can have with the Lord when we begin to understand that He desires to be a friend to us.

While it's a pleasure for us to introduce our friends to other people, there could never be a more important introduction of a friend than the Lord.

God wants us to know Him as a friend! That's not to put us on the same level as God, but it speaks of the intimacy God longs for us to have with Him - God's grace.

We have 4 basic different classifications of friends:

1. Acquaintances - Implying more than recognition and less than friendship

For example: Infrequent contact people we see at Wal-mart and say hi.

2. Casual friends - Happening or appearing by chance

For example: Common interests might see at a ball park every week or so.

3. Close friends – Sharing of life's goals, but not private thoughts.

For example: Share life's goals. People we would go to their house and visit but would not necessarily share our most private thoughts with.

4. Intimate friends – Sharing of life's goals with private thoughts and struggles shared along the journey.

For example: Regular contact and trust (this is the relationship God desires with us.)

Illus: FACEBOOK FRIENDS

Almost everyone now days as Friends on FACEBOOK. We have certain people in life that know us and "ask" us to be our friends. We have the choice to CONFIRM them, ignore them by pushing NOT NOW, or DELETE them.

Metaphorically speaking, I believe that God is trying to FRIEND REQUEST you. What are you going to do about it?

So, in looking at the Father as our friend, I think one of the greatest examples of this friendship is found with the friendship of Jesus and Lazarus. Turn with me to, John 11 as we look at this text of scripture.

Mary and Martha had a brother who stuck with them but sickness and death severed their relationship. Their brother who was there through thick and thin. Their brother who was their handy man. Their brother who carried thier heavy burdens. Their brother who protected them from harm. But suddenly that earthly closeness was interrupted by the untimely hands of death. But they had a friend, that would come to their aid when their brother couldn't. Jesus, is a friend that will stick closer than a brother. Not only will He stick closer but when a brother falls, He'll

pick him up....Lazurus the brother died but Jesus the Friend called him back to life....He is that friend that sticketh closer than a brother...

John 11:1-11:44

LAZARUS – JOHN 11

Even the most biblically illiterate person has heard the story of the raising of Lazarus. It is a very familiar story to many of us. Yet the truth is it is a story that we rarely read, fail to understand and more importantly I believe wonder how it actually applies to our daily lives. So this morning let us turn together to John 11 and look again at this familiar story.

CONTEXT

Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha. Their home in Bethany, a village some 2 miles outside Jerusalem, was obviously a place where Jesus was made welcome and felt very much at home. We know from John 10.40-42 that Jesus was presently staying in the area of Perea, some 20 miles from Bethany, across the Jordan. So Jesus is about a days journey away from the home of Lazarus. In the opening couple of verses in chapter 11 we learn that Lazarus is ill and that Mary, his sister, on a previous occasion had poured perfume on to the feet of Christ and wiped it with her hair, a very intimate act. Mary and Martha send word to Jesus that Lazarus is ill (verse 3) and the implication in the message is that He should come immediately.

DELAY.

Read verses 4-6. Do you not find this a strange reaction of Jesus to their message? He delays. They have sent word, obviously urgent word, that Lazarus their brother, the ‘one Jesus loved’, is ill and yet Christ delays. Not just for a few hours but for two days. Why? Why delay like this? Does Jesus not really love Lazarus? Is He indifferent to the suffering of Mary and Martha? Does He not actually care after all? Or is He afraid to go back to Bethany? After all it is in Judea and there was a price on His head in Judea.

Well the reasons for the delay is given to us. In verse 4 the reason is ‘God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.’ Then if you turn to verse 15 we read that the reason for the delay ‘that you might believe’ and again in verse 42 ‘for the benefit of the people...that they may believe.’ Here are the reasons for the delay in going to Lazarus. Mary and Martha wanted an immediate response, as we often do. To delay would seem to be cruel, indifferent and uncaring. But that is because we do not have the full picture. The truth is delays are inevitable in this life. Truth is delays are always from our perspective because we live within time – but God is not limited by time and therefore His time of answering is always right – never late and never early. God’s love is not the love of an indulgent parent who gives in to every whim of the child. God’s purpose is to make us holy, not (contrary to all the propaganda) to make us happy. God allows things into our lives which our self-centred pursuit of happiness would never allow.

So Jesus delays in going to Bethany. He delays – remember that – it is not that He refuses to go. It is not that He does not care or that He is indifferent to Lazarus, Mary or Martha. The delay is for the glory of God and for their greater good – that they may believe. It is exactly the same in our lives. So remember that when you are attempted to give up in prayer or to start to believe that God is uncaring, indifferent and will not answer. His delays are the means of bringing glory to the

Father and to bringing faith into the hearts of men. Jesus knew that He was in this world to serve the Father, to bring the Father glory by doing His will. He was not in the world to answer the ‘felt needs’ of the world. He was not at the ‘beck and call’ of the world but in the world to do the perfect will of the Father.

Verse 7 – after two days Jesus announces that He is now intending to go to Bethany. The disciples, with the exception of Thomas, try to dissuade Him from going. ‘It is far too dangerous’ they say in verse 8. Then in verse 11 Jesus tells them why they are now going – Lazarus is ‘asleep.’ They misunderstand Him, thinking He means literal sleep when Jesus is in fact saying ‘Lazarus is dead’ (14).

Mary and Martha.

Then in the next section of the passage we encounter Martha and then Mary. Look at verse 17 – Lazarus has been in the tomb 4 days. At the time of Jesus many believed that after 3 days the soul departed the body and that the body would then begin to decompose. The body would be anointed on the third day and then the tomb would not be opened again. So in this little snippet of information John tells us there is no doubt Lazarus is dead and that his body was now decaying. It also tells us that by the time Jesus received the news that Lazarus was ill he had in fact already died. So you see the delay was not responsible for his death but would be the means of his resurrection from the dead.

When Martha hears that Jesus is coming she goes out to meet Him, whilst Mary remains in the house mourning. Martha and Mary both make similar confessions to Jesus ‘if only you had been here Lazarus would not have died’ – verses 21 and 32. Both Mary and Martha wrongly believe that Jesus is there to minister to their ‘felt-needs.’ The same is true today of many within the Christian church – believing Jesus is there to minister to their needs. Many Christians want a Jesus who answers all their needs whenever they call Him to do so. Many within the church also have that mentality concerning the pastor, but thankfully not here at Eastgate. They believe he should come whenever they call, instead of relying upon God first. Now don’t get me wrong; we as pastors will be there when we can, in your time of need. But if I or Pastor John or Joel, Kathy, Gerson, Howard or any of the others can’t be there, you can still count on God!

Martha adds in verse 22 READ. Even now Martha confesses that Jesus is the answer, although as we shall see her belief is not as strong or deep as her words would have us believe. Jesus then speaks – verse 23 and Martha’s response in verse 24 is to state the Pharisaical belief in the general resurrection on the last day. But Jesus is not speaking about the general resurrection but about the resurrection of Lazarus in particular and more importantly of Himself. In verse 25 He makes one of His ‘I am...’ statements – read verse 25. When He finishes the statement He then asks a question of Martha – ‘do you believe this?’ Martha’s confession in verse 27 is similar to Peter’s when asked by Jesus ‘Who do men say I am?’ Then Mary enters the scene. Martha had gone to get her and told her that Jesus had been asking for her. Mary had spent this time sitting at home mourning, as was the tradition of the day. Many family, friends and official mourners had come to comfort her and to pray with her at this time of grief. But isn’t it interesting that amongst the mourners there were also cynics, who we will come to in a few minutes. Upon hearing that Jesus was asking for her Mary leaves in such a hurry that the mourners assume she is going to the tomb of Lazarus to grieve and they follow. When she encounters Jesus Mary falls at his feet and bathes them with her tears – something which she had done on a previous occasion – but then it was

tears of repentance, now they are tears of grief. Jesus is obviously deeply moved by this – as we can see from verse 33. John tells us Jesus was ‘deeply moved and troubled.’ This description is normally used of someone who is moved to anger by what he sees. John wants us to understand that Christ is moved deep within His spirit at what He witnesses. His anger is not directed at Mary nor Martha but at death and the one behind death – satan.

Then in verse 34 Jesus asks to be taken to the tomb of His friend and we read that ‘He wept’ verse 35. Some of those looking on assume that His tears are a sign of His love for Lazarus but I want you to note at this point that Christ is not weeping for Lazarus. Why would you weep over someone you were going to raise from the dead? Christ knew what He was about to do so the tears are not for Lazarus – he is going to be raised to life. Jesus’ tears are for Mary and Martha and the grief of their souls at the death of Lazarus. His tears are for the pain that death brings into the life of a family and friends. His tears are for all of humanity who must go through this experience at some point of their lives here on earth. His tears are for the consequences of the sin of Adam and Eve which brought death into creation and brought such pain into the hearts of mankind. He weeps with them and He weeps for them. But here comes the cynics. You know there will always be cynics around you, even when you are grieving. Look at what they say verse 37 – read. They never say it directly to Mary, nor Martha but they doubt Jesus here. ‘I mean, if He could help a complete stranger, why would He not have helped His friend Lazarus?’ Isn’t that the reaction of some of your friends when grief, of whatever kind, comes to your door? Don’t you hear their questions of ‘where is God now? What use is your faith now?’ They may not say it directly to you but it is there in their comments and questions. The answer to the cynics comes in the form a miracle.

John tells us that Jesus was once more ‘deeply moved’ when He arrived at the tomb. Jesus instructs them to remove the stone from the tomb. Just a little aside, men had to remove the stone from the tomb of Lazarus – but the power of God removed the stone from the tomb of Jesus. But back to this story. Look at Martha’s reaction to this request of Jesus – read verse 39. Martha had stated her belief in Jesus as the Christ. She had said she believed Him when He said He was the resurrection but now when asked to take a step of faith – up comes all the reasons for not removing the stone. Lord, Lazarus has been dead four days – dead, four days. What was she saying in reality – ‘Lord it is an impossible situation – there is no life here only death. Lord, there is no hope here.’ Then she says ‘and besides that the smell will be awful.’ Lord, the body will have begun to decompose and it will smell bad. Lord, don’t ask us to open the grave we could not face looking upon Lazarus’ body now.

Friends there will always be reasons not to take that step of faith. They will, like these reasons of Martha, be reasonable and sensible as to why you should not do what Jesus has commanded. But friends there were two precedents for what Jesus had commanded them to do – hadn’t Elijah and Elisha raised two boys from the dead? Hadn’t Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter and the widow of Nain’s son from the dead? And even if these had not occurred – hadn’t they already stated their belief that God would answer whatever Jesus asked. Now they are called to put their faith into actions. Jesus challenges their unbelief and again states the reason for what is about to happen – that they might see the glory of God.

Then in verse 42 Jesus prays – not for His benefit but so that the crowd may be in no doubt as to whom the glory belongs. Jesus thanks the Father for what is about to happen, even before it

happens. All along He has been praying to the Father – praying for the Father’s will to be done and the Father’s glory to be manifested. There is a lesson there for us all in our prayer life – the key to any of our prayers – what will bring God the greatest glory?

Then in verses 43 and 44 the miracle happens. Jesus calls to Lazarus and upon hearing the voice of Jesus Lazarus walks forth from the grave. The voice of Christ brings life to the dead Lazarus. Jesus reveals His authority over death. The power which had held mankind in its terrible grip has been defeated. Death has been conquered by the Word of Jesus. This is the revelation of the glory of God and the glorification of the Son – the defeat of death. The Word of God in Christ brings forth life from the grave. Now I want you to listen to the final words of Christ Jesus here – ‘take off his grave clothes.’

Friends, Lazarus had the strength to shuffle from the grave but he was still wearing the clothes of the grave. Wrapped around him were the linen clothes of a dead body. He had been raised to life but he was still in the shroud of death and the shroud needed to be removed – but he was unable to do that himself – he needed help. Again there is a simple lesson for each of us here. As Christian believers we have been raised from a life that leads to eternal death to a life that leads to eternal life. We have gone down into the grave with Christ and been raised to New Life in Christ. Yet many Christians still shuffle about with ‘grave clothes’ on. Many Christians are still bound in the clothes of death. What am I talking about? I am talking about the old habits, the old lifestyle, the old man that you were before you were raised to new life by the grace of God. When Lazarus was raised from the dead he had no need of grave clothes. When he was raised from the dead he did not want to wear a shroud, it would only be a reminder of the days spend in the tomb. Lazarus had no desire to wear grave clothes after being raised from the dead but though he had the strength to walk out of the tomb after being called by Christ he needed help to remove the grave clothes.

Friends it is true for some of you in here this morning. Some of you know the reality of being raised to new life in Christ but this morning you are still shuffling along the road wearing grave clothes. Your old self, your old lifestyle, your old habits are still around your feet and you are unable to walk by faith and instead you shuffle – not very far though. You have no business this morning waddling around in grave clothes if you have been raised to new life in Christ. Those old habits, those old attitudes, that old lifestyle, that old way of life, that old man only led to the grave. Why would you still entrap yourself with those things when you have been freed from sin and death by the grace of God in Christ? I will tell you why you are still shuffling because you are too proud to ask for help. You are too proud to admit you even need help. You are putting on the false face and telling everyone ‘it is fine, my Christian life is fine. I have been born again into new life.’ The truth is your shuffling along when you should be walking and the only thing stopping you walking this morning are the grave clothes of your past life. So when are you going to let others help you remove your grave clothes? When are you going to allow others who have had the same grave clothes as you removed to help you remove yours? Aren’t you fed up shuffling yet? Don’t you want to walk with Christ instead of shuffling along in your faith? Then get rid of the grave clothes that stop you from walking. Friends the truth is some of you like to shuffle. Some of you have gotten so use to shuffling you don’t even know the Christian life is not supposed to be like that. Listen to Jesus this morning ‘take the grave clothes off.’

He is your friend. A friend who is closer than a brother. A friend who desires the clothes of the past, the despair of the past, the things that are holding you back; He desires to rid you of these things.

Finally, you will be glad to hear, I want to remind you what this passage teaches us:

The Shadow of God's love – when it appears that God delays it is because He wants us to see the Father's glory revealed and to believe in Christ as His Son, our true friend.

The Sympathy of Jesus – Jesus comes to us and He weeps with us and for us in our distress, in our trials, in our tribulations and in our grief. He weeps for us and with us. He is deeply moved and troubled by our tears – remember that. Remember those wonderful words in Psalm 56 verse 8.

The authority of Christ over death – in the face of death in Christ alone there is the hope of the resurrection to new life. Death is a universal fact – as a poster I once read said '10 out of 10 cats said there owners met it.' In Christ alone is there hope over death because He alone conquered death by rising from the dead.

Conclusion:

So, after seeing this story of Jesus friendship and love for Lazarus, let me share with you these difference aspects of the Father's friendship with us compared to the friendships of this world...

There is a Friend that Sticketh Closer Than a Brother.

- A Brother can cry with you/Jesus can wipe away all your tears.
- A Brother can pray with you/Jesus can answer your prayer.
- A Brother can share your storm/Jesus can calm your storms.
- A Brother can die for you/Jesus rose for you.
- A Brother can be your lawyer/Jesus can set you free.
- A Brother can carry your body to the a dark grave/Jesus can carry your soul to Bright Glory.
- A Brother can stand by you/Jesus can stand for you.

It's time to make God your best friend. It's time for you to realize that HE is a friend that shall be there for you and stick with you though it all!

And as you do.... You wait, you watch, you'll see!

Coming up...

Part 1: I Am Your Father - and because of this...

Part 2: I Am Your Protector - He will fight for us.

Part 3: I Am Your Provider - He is our source.

Part 4: I Am Your Companion - He is our friend, who will never leave us.

Part 5: I Am Your Teacher - He teaches us all things that ensure our success in life.

Part 6: I Am Your All - There is nothing or no one like Him. He is our I AM!

Song: I am a Friend of God... He calls me friend....

Song: What a friend we have in Jesus.