

## INTRODUCTION

Before we study any passage of scripture we must recognize the context. In John 15 Jesus and the eleven disciples have left the upper room where they had the Last Supper. They are walking down at night toward the Garden of Gethsemane. As they passed a vineyard, Jesus paused to teach them that He is the true vine and we are the branches. God wants us to be fruitful and the only way we can do that is by staying firmly connected to the vine, Jesus.

The disciples were confused and scared. Jesus had been talking about leaving them. As they continued to walk, Jesus gave them the great promise of joy. He said, "I have told you these things that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

Jesus said that God is glorified when we bear much fruit. He has already talked about peace and joy, and now He talks about love. The first three flavors of the fruit of the Holy Spirit are love, joy, and peace.

So let's walk along with Jesus and the disciples and listen in to these final words that Jesus gives before He goes to the cross. We're going to learn about How to Treat your Friends and Enemies.

John 15:12-17 CSB. "This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn't know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. "This is what I command you: Love one another."

This message is an example of good news/bad news. The good news is that we have a friend who loves us and the bad news is that we will have enemies who hate us. When someone asks you whether you want the good news or the bad news first, which do you choose? I heard about a teenager who asked his dad, "Dad, I have good news and bad news, which do you want to hear?" The dad said, "give me the good news." His son said, "Well, the airbags in my car work."

We're going to look at the good news first and then we're going to find out that the bad news isn't as bad as you think. The first thing we discover is:

### I. WE HAVE A FRIEND WHO LOVES US.

Jesus told His disciples that starting that night, He would call them friends, not servants. It is a revolutionary truth that we can be friends with our Creator. Abraham was called a friend of God. The Bible said that Moses spoke to God face to face as a man speaks to a friend. When Jesus was told that Lazarus had died, He said, "Our friend, Lazarus has gone to sleep, but I'm going to wake him up."

Because Jesus is our friend, we can learn some qualities of true friendship. Proverbs 17:17 says that "a friend loves at all times." In this life, you will have many acquaintances, but you are rich indeed if you have a few real friends. My favorite definition of a friend is this: "A friend is someone who walks in when everyone else has walked out."

The practical application of this point is: What kind of friend are you being to others? Jesus gives us two characteristics of a true friend.

### **A. A real friend sacrifices freely.**

By now it's nearing midnight, and Jesus knew that this next day would be the day ordained from the foundation of the world when the lamb of God would be slain. He knew He was going to die. He said, "No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13 CSB)

Are you willing to lay down your life? Years ago, I was in Glenn Eyrie Conference Center in Colorado Springs. I was speaking to a group of pastors. I got up early one morning and walked out to have my quiet time with the Lord. The scenery and setting was breathtaking. As I was walking back I came upon a metal memorial placed on the ground. It said, "Dawson Earl Trotman" and it had his birth and death dates, 1906-1956. And below that was an inscription from John 15:13 that said, "Greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends."

At that time I knew that Dawson Trotman was the Founder of the Navigators, but I was surprised to see that he died at the age of 50. I asked one of the workers at Glenn Eyrie how he died. They told me Dawson was with some friends at a lake in New York state when the boat capsized. Instead of clinging to the hull until help could come, Dawson saw that one of the girls couldn't swim, so he swam out to rescue her. He struggled to keep her head above water until another swimmer could reach them, but by the time another boat arrived, Dawson's strength was gone and he drowned. He died saving that young girl. He really did lay down his life for a friend.

Are you willing to lay down your life for your friends? It may not mean that you have to die. It could mean that we lay down our wishes and desires in order to fulfill the wishes and desires of our friends. It means you'd be willing to sacrifice, time, money, and energy for a friend. Jesus is such a great friend that He literally laid down His life for us.

### **B. A real friend serves gladly.**

Even though Jesus said he wouldn't call the disciples servants, a real friend will have the heart of a servant. That's what Jesus said in John 15:14. "You are my friends if you do what I command you." Jesus had modeled servanthood earlier that evening when He had washed the disciples' feet. There's a difference between a servant and a friend. A servant does what his

master commands because he is hired to do that. But a friend gladly serves because he loves the Master. In John 14:15 Jesus said, "If you love me you will keep my commandments."

A true friend is quick to listen to see how he can serve his friend. One of my favorite stories from the Old Testament is when David is hiding out in a cave and the Philistines had control of his hometown, Bethlehem. One evening David says, "Oh, if I could only drink the water from the well in Bethlehem." Three of his mighty men heard him say that. So that night they slipped into Bethlehem and at the risk of their lives, brought him some water from the well. David was so moved by their act of bravery and friendship that he refused to drink it. Instead he poured it out as an offering to God.

A good friend listens and tries to serve. But I learned a long time ago that you have to be careful with what you say. When I was a college student I was serving as a youth pastor in a church in Montgomery. I was speaking to the group one night and I happened to mention how much I love Red Velvet Cake. I would commute each weekend from Birmingham and stay in the home of one of the church members.

That next weekend I showed up and one of the girls in the youth group, named Sabrina had baked a Red Velvet cake for me. I was so appreciative. Her heart was in the right place, but her baking skills were sorely lacking. When I took the cake to the house where I stayed I cut a big slice and tasted it. It was awful. It was dry and hard, so after a couple of bites I had to throw it away. But every weekend it was the same thing—a red velvet cake. And I would say "Thank you" and take it back and throw it away. I would always taste them to see if she was improving, but they were still pretty bad.

After several weeks, Sabrina asked me, "David, how do you like my cakes?" Uh oh, I didn't want to lie, and I didn't want to hurt her feelings so I just said, "You know, Sabrina, all I can say is that your cakes don't stay around my house very long." To this day, I'm not a real fan of red velvet cakes.

But Sabrina was being a friend. She heard me say what I liked and she wanted to serve. Her heart was in the right place.

We have a friend who loves us: His name is Jesus. But as you continue to read the words of Jesus, He warned the disciples that they would have enemies as well.

John 15:18-25 CSB. "If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you. Remember the word I spoke to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they don't know the one who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now they have no excuse for their sin. The one who hates me also hates my Father. If I had not done the works among them that no one else has done, they would not be

guilty of sin. Now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But this happened so that the statement written in their law might be fulfilled: They hated me for no reason." [Psalm 69:4]

The second thing we learn from this passage is that

## **II. WE WILL HAVE ENEMIES WHO OPPOSE US.**

Later, these words would take on new meaning for the disciples. Because not long after Jesus spoke these words, enemies of Jesus arrived to arrest him. He was turned over to the cruel Romans who would torture Him and nail Him to a cross.

Then in the book of Acts we see the terrible persecution against the early church. While they were being hated, the disciples could look back to this night and say, "We shouldn't be surprised because the Master warned us that the world would hate us like it hated Him."

You will either be a friend of Jesus, or a friend of the world. And if you are a friend of Jesus, the world will hate you. When Jesus used the word "world" he wasn't talking about the planet. Because the Bible says "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." He wasn't talking about the world of people because "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son." He was talking about a human system that doesn't believe in God or believe in His Word. This system of humanity without God is still in place today—and Satan is called the god of this world.

The reason the world hates us is because our moral position is based on the Word of God.

It gives me no pleasure to say that there are a lot of people out there that hate me because of my stand for Biblical morality. You don't have to look very far down in the Google feed for my name to find the site for the dirty deeds of David Dykes. These people are mad at me because of my position on homosexual behavior. But I'm not mad at anybody. We just disagree. I always speak the truth in love. I've learned a very important principle about enemies: You may create enemies because of your position. But you should never create enemies because of your disposition.

There are some unloving believers who use the Bible like a hammer to pound their truth into people who disagree with them. Their disposition is disagreeable. But you really can disagree with someone without being disagreeable.

So when you are hated because you choose to be a friend of Jesus instead of a friend of the world, how should you react? Here are three ways to respond when people hate you for your stand for Christ.

### **A. Don't take it personally.**

Jesus said, "They will hate you because they hated me first." And then He said, "The reason the world hates me is because I pointed out their sin." Sometimes just your Christian lifestyle becomes an offense to others.

God made a huge change in my life between my junior and senior year of High School. In the summer of 1970, fifty years ago, God called me to preach as a 17 year-old teenager. And during my senior year, everyone in my high school considered me a Jesus freak. I can remember that my high school basketball coach had a foul mouth and a short temper. Sometimes at half-time, if we were trailing, he would yell and use terrible profanity. Then he would look at me and say, "Excuse my language, Dykes." I just smiled the first five or six times he said that. And finally I said, "Coach, I'm not the one you should be apologizing to." I recall that I sat on the bench for the second half of that game.

So here's this thirty-year-old adult, who was intimidated by a 17-year-old high school senior who was trying to live for Jesus. My very presence intimidated him because I made him aware of his foul mouth.

The world thinks we are condemning them, when all we are doing is being salt and light in the world. But when you live in darkness your exposed to a bright light, it's painful. And when you are part of a corrupt culture, salt is going to sting. Jesus said, "They will hate you because they hated me first."

## **B. Don't retaliate.**

We all have a natural instinct to protect ourselves. If someone throws something at your face, your natural instinct is to duck. You don't have to really even think about it. It's instinct. In the same way, when someone insults us, our natural instinct is to insult them back. If they give you a verbal slap, you want to give them a verbal slap.

But the Bible says in Romans 12:18-19 (CSB): "If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God's wrath, because it is written, 'Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay,' says the Lord."

This principle was demonstrated later on this same night in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus was praying and the disciples were sleeping when a mob suddenly arrived. They were being attacked. Simon Peter acted instinctively. When he saw their swords, he pulled out his sword to fight back. He was going to defend himself, and he was going to defend his Lord. There was one man coming toward him. Now Peter was a fisherman, not a swordsman. Whoosh! I believe Peter was trying to split the head of his enemy, but he missed, and sliced off the man's ear.

Jesus said, "Whoa, Peter, whoa!" He said, "Put your sword away, Peter, because the person that lives by the sword is going to die by the sword." And Dr. Luke tells us that Jesus reached down and healed the severed ear of the man. Then Jesus said, "Peter, don't you know if I wanted to, I could call down twelve legions of angels, 72,000 angels? They could come here and rescue me

right now. God is up to something big here, Peter and you're about to mess it up. Put away your sword."

Some of you may have your swords of retaliation drawn. Put away your sword. Leave room for God to work.

### **C. Show kindness to your enemy.**

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "You have heard it said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, 'Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you. That you may be children of your Father in Heaven.'"

One of the birthmarks of a believer is that we don't hate those who hate us, we love them. Because God loves them. And the best way to show love to your enemy is to show them kindness.

The Bible says in Romans 12:20 (CSB): "But If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in so doing you will be heaping fiery coals on his head."

Showing kindness to your enemies can transform them into your allies. A few weeks ago in WEBS I taught about the miracle in 2 Kings 6. The army of the Arameans were set on attacking Elisha and the Israelites. But at the command of Elisha the entire army was struck blind. Elisha led them straight into the capital city of Samaria. When they were surrounded by the Israelite army, Elisha said, "Open their eyes." Suddenly the enemy looked around and they thought they were going to be killed. In fact the King of Israel asked Elisha, "Shall we kill them?" Elisha said, "No. Don't kill them. Give them food to eat and water to drink." And this act of kindness was just as better than a victory in battle because nobody died, and the Bible says the Arameans never invaded Israel after that.

Our goal should be to try to convert our enemies to our friends. Booker T. Washington was a great American educator who founded Tuskegee University in Alabama. He wrote: "I will not allow any man to make me lower myself by hating him. The only way I can destroy my enemy is to make him my friend."

Jesus said the world will hate you because you are different. Vance Havner wrote about watching a parade as a marching band went by. Every band member was in step except for one. He was out of step with the rest of the band. Vance Havner said he looked closer and saw that the band member had an earplug attached to a transistor radio and he was marching to the beat of a different tune. That's like us. The world wants us to get in step with them. They want us to dance to their music. But we are marching to the beat of a heavenly song In Romans 12:2 Paul said, "Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

### **CONCLUSION**

Jesus had friends He loved. And He had enemies who hated Him. But He loved His enemies. While He was being crucified He said, "Father, forgive them. For they don't know what they are doing."

You may be saying, "Pastor, it's hard to love my enemies." It's not hard. It's impossible. You and I do not have the capacity to love our enemies in our own strength. We can't produce the fruit of love, joy or peace on our own. He is the vine and we are the branches, and as we stay connected to Jesus, He will love our enemies through us.

Jesus loves you and He wants to be your friend. In 1855 Joseph Scriven wrote a poem to send to his dying mother. He never lived long enough himself to know that it was put to music and has become one of the most beloved songs in history. Listen to these powerful words: "What a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. Oh, what peace we often forfeit. Oh, what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer." The third verse really speaks to where we are right now. "Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged. Take it to the Lord in prayer."

Just as you have a relationship with human friends, you can be a friend of Jesus. You see, the Christian life is not a religion to be endured. It is a personal relationship to be enjoyed. And today, Jesus would love to come into your heart and to become your forever friend. You can invite Him to come into your heart today by praying a simple prayer of faith. I encourage you to pray this prayer with me right now.

God, I'm a sinner and I'm sorry. Please forgive me. I believe Jesus Christ is Your Son and I want to trust Him as my Savior. I'm willing to follow Him as my Lord from this day forward and forever. In Jesus name, AMEN.

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For the Joy...  
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