

"The Cost of Friendship

Brief Talk on John 15:12-16:4

Introduction

During his life on earth, Jesus did not surround himself with a group of students or even a group of followers. He placed himself in the company of those he addressed as friends. I used to think it was a sign of spiritual strength when someone said, " I don't really need other people. I just need the Lord." Now, I see it as a sign of immaturity. Close relationships are Christlike!

As Jesus continues his conversation with his disciples, Jesus shows us what friendship with him is really like. There is both comfort and cost. (vv. 12-17). While Jesus wanted his disciples to know the privileges of discipleship, he clearly warned them that following him would be costly.

Andrew died on a cross, Simon was crucified, Bartholomew was flayed alive, James (son of Zebedee) was beheaded, The other James (son of Alphaeus) was beaten to death, Thomas was run through with a lance Matthias was stoned and then beheaded, Matthew was slain by the sword, Peter was crucified upside down, Thaddeus was shot to death with arrows, Philip was hanged.

Only John made it through alive but he was exiled to a small island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea.

Christianity is not a Sunday morning religion. It is a hungering after God to the point of death if need be. It shakes our foundations, topples our priorities, pits us against friend and family, and makes us strangers in this world.

Questions for discussion

1. What are some of the most important qualities in a friend? Who is your closest friend? Take some time to pray for that person as you begin this study.

2. Jesus already told his disciples to love each other (John 13:34-35)
(a) How does his instructions in verses 12 and 13 raise the standard of our love? (b) In practical terms, how do we show love to our fellow parishioners, to the minister/s, to other Christians?

3. What are the requirements and benefits of friendship with Jesus (vv. 14-17)

4. Is being a friend of Jesus the same as being a believer in Jesus? Explain.

5. Read John 15:18-25. Why does Jesus switch from talking about love to talk about hate?

6. (a) How will you define the "world" in the context of this passage?
(b) What reasons does Jesus give for the world's hatred?

7. (a) Give one or two specific examples of how you have experienced the world's hatred as a Christian? (b) How did you respond to the hostility at the time? (c) What kinds of persecution are most probable for us in our society? Explain your answer.

8. If we as Christians are not persecuted in some way, what might that imply about our spiritual commitment?

9. What does Jesus mean when he says that without his coming, his words and his miracles, the world "would not be guilty of sin." (vv. 22-25)?

10. Read John 15: 26-16:4. In what ways will the Counsellor and the disciples themselves continue the ministry begun by Jesus (vv. 26, 27)?

Conclusion

Before the breakup of the Soviet Union, Christians were routinely persecuted for their faith by the Communist regime. We have many inspiring stories of courageous Christians behind the Iron Curtain who were willing to die for their faith during this difficult period in world history.

One such story involves a house church in a city in the former Soviet Union. The small group of believers who gathered there were afraid to carry Bibles, so they memorized large sections of the New Testament and recited Scripture to each other.

Each week they would arrive at the house at different times, to avoid arousing the suspicions of KGB informers. On one particular Sunday the church members were all safely inside the building, with the windows closed and doors locked. They began the service by softly singing a hymn and praying.

Suddenly, the door burst open and two soldiers armed with automatic weapons walked in. One shouted, "All right, everybody up against the wall. If you wish to renounce your faith in Jesus Christ, you can leave now and no harm will come to you."

Two or three church members left, then another. "This is your last chance!" the other soldier warned. "Either turn your back on this Jesus of yours or stay and suffer the consequences!" Another member left. Two more covered their faces in shame and slipped out into the night. No one else moved. Parents with small children trembling beside them looked down reassuringly. They fully expected to be gunned down on the spot—or, at the very least, imprisoned.

After a few moments of silence, the soldiers closed the door and looked back at the church members left standing against the wall. One of them said, "Keep your hands up—but this time in praise to our Lord Jesus Christ, brothers and sisters. We, too, are Christians. We were sent to another house church several weeks ago to arrest a group of believers. But instead, we were converted." The other soldier added, "We are sorry to have frightened those who left, but we have learned that unless people are willing to die for their faith, they cannot be fully trusted."

Can you be trusted with the gospel? It is a very precious thing that we have been given—paid for not only by the blood of Jesus, but by the blood of countless martyrs who were willing to die rather than renounce their faith.

The devil is no dummy. He knows that Christianity is only one generation away from being extinct, and he will do all he can to soften us up and make us lazy. Ultimately that will do more harm to the gospel than even our unbelief. What would you have done when the soldiers arrived?