

Why Jesus Is The Best Friend You Could Ever Have

Matthew 11:18-19 and Luke 19:1-10

At the close of one morning worship service, the pastor stepped back to the pulpit and read his letter of resignation. The whole congregation was expecting it; they had known for several days that he had been talking with another church about becoming their pastor. His resignation said all the things resignations usually say—that he had enjoyed being their pastor and serving the Lord together with them. The pastor concluded his resignation by saying, “The same Jesus who led me to you is now leading me to another church.” The minister of music then stepped up to the platform and led the congregation in their final song: *“What A Friend We Have in Jesus.”*

Jesus truly is a Friend! Even His enemies recognized that Jesus was a Friend to sinners. But what is a real friend? Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote once that “every man passes his life in search for friendship.” One definition I’ve read somewhere is that “friendship is one mind in two bodies.” Christian Bovee said that “false friends are like a shadow, keeping close to us while we walk in the sunshine, but leaving us when we cross into the shade.”

Years ago when Pepper Rodgers was the head football coach at the University of California at Los Angeles, he had one particularly bad season. It was so terrible that it affected his home life. Rodgers described the situation at home: “My dog was my only friend. I told my wife that a man needs at least two friends—and she bought me another dog.”

One definition of a friend which the Pharisees could have adopted is “one who dislikes the same people that you dislike.” The Pharisees and teachers of the Law of Moses did not like it that Jesus associated with the common people of the land, so in mockery they said He was a “friend of sinners.” The Pharisees did not realize what a great truth they were speaking—Jesus is indeed the Best Friend you and I could ever have. How do we know that? The passage in the nineteenth chapter of Luke which we read a moment ago gives us some clues, which are supported by all the rest of Scripture. Do you need a real friend today? Then hear the Word of the Lord! Jesus is the Best Friend you could ever have...

1 Because no one else knows as much about you as He does.

1 Luke tells us in his gospel that Jesus was passing through Jericho, and as He walked along the road, surrounded by the crowd of people, a short man by the name of Zacchaeus climbed up into a tree to get a better look at Jesus. Put yourself up there in that tree with Zacchaeus, and imagine what happened that day. Experience the roughness of the

branch under you. Feel the heat rising up from the ground. Squint your eyes to keep out the dust. Hear the noise and confusion of the crowd around Jesus. Watch Jesus as He walks along the road which leads right by your tree. Feel your heart being to beat faster as Jesus stops right under the branch where you are sitting, and looks up, right into your eyes. As Jesus stands there looking up, the crowd settles down as if to say, “What’s He looking at?”

Then, when everything grows quiet, Jesus calls you by your first name! How did He know? But before you have a chance to hide behind another branch of the tree, Jesus says, “Zacchaeus! Come down! I’m going to your house for dinner.” As Luke tells the story, Zacchaeus, the hated tax collector, came down at once, and welcomed Jesus into his home. But Jesus knew more about Zacchaeus than just his name. He knew the need Zacchaeus had in his life for a real Friend, Someone who didn’t care what other people said about him, Someone who didn’t despise him because of his reputation.

Years ago, I heard someone say that a real friend is someone who knows everything there is to know about you, and still chooses to be your friend. The more I think about that, the more I like it, especially when I read from Psalm 139 in the Old Testament:

O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, you know it completely, O Lord.... You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body.

Or when I read from Jeremiah:

I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve (17:10).

Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the Lord. (23:24)

Or from John 10:

He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out... I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me. (vv. 3, 14)

Think of that—Jesus knows everything there is to know about us, yet He still chooses to be the Best Friend we could ever have!

Do you remember the story of the woman who came to Jesus while He was eating dinner with a Pharisee? She stood behind Jesus weeping, and her tears fell on His feet. So she wiped His feet with her hair, and poured perfume on them. A very moving scene! Yet the Pharisees who were there mumbled to themselves, *“If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.”* But Jesus **did know** who she was, and He knew what kind of woman she was, and He knew that she needed a real Friend. Yes, Jesus was her Best Friend, because He knew everything there was to know about her, and still chose to be her friend (Luke 7:36-39).

And here’s one more example, if you need it. When Judas approached Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane to betray Him, Jesus knew why he was there. Yet Jesus said to Judas, *“Friend, do what you came for”* (Matthew 26:50). Jesus didn’t say to him, “You low-life scum, go ahead and do what you came to do. Get it over with.” He knew everything there was to know about Judas, and chose to be his friend anyway.

Listen, there is no one who knows any more about you than Jesus. When everyone else might choose to avoid you, or when they claim to be your friend only when it will help their own personal reputations, Jesus puts His arm around your shoulders and says, “Never mind about them. I’m here, and I’m your Friend.”

2 Because no one else believes in you the way He does.

Zacchaeus had a lot of things going against him. He was a tax-collector, and therefore considered to be a traitor to his people, since he worked for the Romans. He was the chief tax-collector for that area, which only added to the problems. Probably no one really liked him, and if anyone was friendly toward him, it may have been only so he might be lenient with them at tax time.

If he was like a lot of people today, he might have been self-conscious about his height. It was very likely that Zacchaeus didn’t have anyone he could call “friend.” But when Jesus said, “I must stay at your house today,” He was demonstrating that He believed in Zacchaeus so much that He was willing to do what no one else would even consider doing: accept hospitality from him.

And Zacchaeus did not disappoint Jesus. Verse 8 tells us that Zacchaeus stood up and said, *“Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated*

anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” Jesus believed in him, when no one else would or could.

Many of us struggle with poor self-images for one reason or another. It may be because of a reputation we think we have. It may be because we imagine others are thinking and saying things about us we do not like. It may be because of some physical characteristic: we’re too tall, too short, too fat, too thin, not handsome or pretty enough. We may have a poor self-image because of something in our past. Listen! A poor self-image can be conquered, but if we want to conquer it, we must start by believing what God says about us. There are many places in the Bible which tell us what God believes about us. Here are two:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ.
(Ephesians 1:4-8)

Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:10)

Why are these things true? Because God believes in us enough to have sent Jesus to die on the cross for us. Because God believes in us enough to adopt us into His Family. Because God believes in us enough to give us redemption through the blood of Christ.

Revelation 1:6 says we have been made kings and priests to Him. Does that sound as though God didn’t care for us? Does that sound as though we were worthless to Him? No, it does not. He believes in us as no one else does, and because of that, only in Him can we become all we can be. An example of that can be found in the apostle Peter. Even though Peter had denied Jesus three times, yet Jesus believed in him enough to give him the task of feeding the “sheep” (John 21:15). Real friends are those who, when you’ve made a fool of yourself, don’t think you’ve done a permanent job, and Jesus believed in Peter as no one else could.

Margaret Parker once described the time that she and her daughter were walking on the beach searching for seashells. The mother admitted that she couldn’t find anything worth keeping, but her small daughter was finding one delightful treasure after another. When

her tiny hands could not hold another shell, she used her mother's beach hat as a bag and kept looking. Mrs. Parker looked down at the collection, and saw that the shells her daughter had picked up to keep were nothing special. Most of what was in the hat was broken into tiny bits. The mother wondered, "When will she learn to be more discriminating?"

Just then her daughter came running up with still another treasured find. She began to see the shells through the eyes of her daughter, and all at once, some of the shells glowed with pastel hues. She noticed the finely sculpted bumps and ridges. And some of them had been broken in the surf in such a way that the spiraling insides could be seen. When they were washed in the waves, the unique loveliness of each shell could be seen more clearly. Then it hit her: "Jesus is like a beachcomber." Mrs. Parker wrote, "He finds humanity washed up, battered, stranded by sinfulness. What if Jesus chose to comb the sands as I do, holding out for wholeness and perfection? We would all be lost." Instead, she realized, "He moves among us just as my daughter combs the beach. No matter how often we have been rejected by others, he sees us as special treasures. He picks us up, washes us and keeps us close to Him. Our Lord can put our broken lives together again." (Decision, 1986, exact date unknown)

In his book, *Be All You Can Be*, John Maxwell told of the time when he was a little kid, walking with his grandfather around his farm. He wrote, "As we walked and looked, he would find uniqueness and beauty in things I wouldn't have looked at twice. He would see great potential in a rundown shed on a back lot; I would see kindling. He would show me a rusty, old tractor and see a machine with possibilities; I would see a piece of rust-covered junk." He was saying that his grandfather could look at something and see great potential. He believed in those things which would have been considered junk by others. Maxwell continued, "Why? How could we look at the same objects and see different things? He owned them and I didn't. Ownership makes a difference."

Jesus owns you, because He paid for you with His death, and that ownership makes a big difference. No one else believes in you the way He does, no one else sees such potential for greatness, and for that reason, He is the Best Friend you could ever have.

3 Because no one else loves you the way He does.

Read very carefully this story of Jesus and Zacchaeus in Luke 19, and you will find not anywhere that Jesus said, "Zacchaeus, I love you." Yet there is love written all over this story. That's why Jesus associated with Zacchaeus. No one else had ever demonstrated this kind of love to him. And when Jesus said in verse nine, "*Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham,*" He was

letting everyone know that here was a man upon whom the love of the eternal God had descended.

Romans 8:38-39 tells us that nothing can separate us from His love:

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That love is the basis for the friendship we can have with Him. He is the Best Friend we could ever have, because no one else loves us the way He does!

In November 1965 a short story by Patricia McGerr appeared in *Woman's Day* magazine. It was so good that *Reader's Digest* picked it up and re-published it more than twenty years later. It was entitled, "Johnny Lingo's Eight-Cow Wife." Time doesn't allow me to repeat the whole story. It is the tale of a man who lived on a small Pacific island, whose daughter was so homely that her father thought he would never be able to arrange a marriage for us. It was the custom on that island that when a man found a woman he wanted to marry, he would give her father a few cows, equal to the amount he thought she was worth. The usual number of cows given in such an arrangement was two or three.

But Johnny Lingo paid eight cows for his wife, whose name was Sarita. One would think that she was the most beautiful woman in the Pacific, to be worth so much. But the truth was that when the deal was struck, Sarita was very homely. As time went by, an amazing transformation took place, until she was indeed very beautiful. There was a special lift to her shoulders, a tilt of her chin, and a sparkle in her eyes. You see, when the women were working together, they would brag about how much their husbands had paid for them. There had been a time when Sarita believed she was worth nothing, but then she knew that regardless of what she looked like, she was actually worth more than any other woman on the island, because her husband had paid eight cows for her. Her husband told a visitor, "Many things can change a woman. Things that happen inside, things that happen outside. But the thing that matters most is what she thinks about herself."

Why did Johnny Lingo pay eight cows for his wife? Because he loved her as no one else did. And why is Jesus the Best Friend we could ever have? Because He loves us in a way unmatched by any other—and He paid much more than eight cows for us!

4 Because no one else ever did for you what He did.

No one had ever done for Zacchaeus what Jesus did. No one would have associated with Zacchaeus for fear of the damage it would do to his own reputation. Yet Jesus

did much more than associate with Zacchaeus, and He made reference to that in Luke 19:10—“*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.*” You see, it was for people like Zacchaeus, and the woman at the well, and Judas Iscariot—and us!—that Jesus willingly went to the Cross. He is the Best Friend we could ever have, because no one else ever did for us what He did when He died on the Cross to pay for our sins.

What He did on Calvary is the greatest sacrifice any friend could ever make for another. John 15:13 is a beautiful verse: “*Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*” And the New Testament is filled with references to the fact that Jesus loves us, and because He loves us, He willingly gave His life for us:

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:6-8)

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

No one has ever given up so much! Every other thing anyone had done for anyone else up to that point was just a mere shadow of real love. When Jesus died, He redefined love. He showed us what real love is. He loved us and died for us when we were most helpless to save ourselves. And the love that He demonstrated while dying on the Cross stands even today against the skepticism and doubts of mankind. We have betrayed Him, yet He died for us anyway. We have spat on Him, yet He died for us anyway. We have scourged Him, yet He died for us anyway. We have driven the nails into His hands, yet He died for us anyway. We have mocked Him, yet He died for us anyway. All the things which we rebellious humans have done or said or thought in defiance of God have not yet changed the eternal fact of His love.

Jesus is the Best Friend we could ever have, because

No one else knows as much us as He does

No one else believes in us the way He does

No one else loves us the way He does

No one else ever did for us what He did.

Will you put your trust today in the One who is waiting to be your Best Friend?