

Exalting Jesus Christ

"The Qualities of a Friend"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. The famous English poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, was born on October 21st, 1772 in Devonshire, England.
 - A. When his father died, nine-year old Coleridge was sent to London to live with his uncle.
 1. There he entered the charity school of Christ's Hospital, taking refuge in books as his only friends.
 2. At nineteen, he entered Cambridge, where his interests vacillated between medicine, philosophy, and writing.
 3. He quickly distinguished himself as a scholar and gained notoriety as a poet, critic, and playwright.
 4. In his twenties, Coleridge lectured extensively on Shakespeare and Milton.
 - a. Many of his poems – such as "The Nightingale," "Kubla Kahn," and the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" – became classics.
 - B. But none of these achievements satisfied the emptiness in his heart for friendship.

1. By the age of twenty-four, he had turned to drugs to deaden the loneliness.
 2. His only close friends were fellow poet William Wordsworth, and later physician James Gillman, who cared for Coleridge during the last eighteen years of the poet's life.
 - a. In many ways these were his happiest years – although Coleridge rarely left the Gillman home.
- C. Most of Coleridge's works dwell on misery, tragedy, and the barrenness of life – expect for one poem written shortly before his death, titled "Youth and Age."
1. The second stanza of that poem contains this moving line, "Friendship is a sheltering tree."
 2. In the final years of his lonely life, Coleridge recognized something that genius, popularity, and money could never replace – he learned how empty life can be without friends.
- II. In our studies through the gospel of John, "Exalting Jesus Christ," we return to the fifteenth chapter of John, and specifically to six verses where Jesus talks about friendship.
- A. When the end of life draws near – as it was doing for Jesus – it's easy to understand why having close friends around brings comfort and reassurance.

1. Not even the Son of God wanted to face death without having the comfort of friends.
2. As the time of His death drew near, perhaps more than at any other time, Jesus wanted to be surrounded by His most intimate friends – His most trusted disciples.
3. When Jesus met with His disciples in that upper room on the eve of His crucifixion, He shared with these men the deepest feelings of His heart.
4. It's here that Jesus explains the "Qualities of a Friend," as He speaks of the love and closeness all believers should have with Him and with one another.

BODY:

- I. Jesus had just told His disciples, "*Abide in My love.*" (**John 15:9a**)
 - A. Love is the element that linked together two important truths Jesus wanted His disciples to understand.
 1. First, they needed to understand the depth and the intensity of the Lord's love for them.
 2. And second, that they needed to understand what it meant to truly love one another in the same way Jesus loved them.
 3. Notice what He said here:

- a. **John 15:12** – *"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."*
 - b. **John 15:17** – *"These things I command you, that you love one another."*
4. The verb "love" in verse 12 is in the present tense in the Greek, which indicates an ongoing action.
- a. In other words, Jesus was saying, "Keep on loving one another as I have loved you."
 - b. Love between us as brothers and sisters in Christ should never be sporadic – it should never be "on" today and "off" tomorrow.
 - c. The kind of love we should have for one another is meant to be constant and dependable.
 - d. It's not some feeling that bubbles to the surface when circumstances are conducive – it's a conscious decision to continually seek the highest good on behalf of those we love.
 - e. Our love for one another needs to be the same kind of love Jesus has for us.
 - f. Our love for one another must be just as unconditional as the Lord's love for us – loving one another because we are all the creation of God and bear the image of God in our souls.

- B. Up to this time, Jesus taught that we are to love God with all our heart, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.
1. **Luke 10:27** – *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself."*
 2. Measuring our love by this standard is as old as the Old Testament Law of Moses.
 - a. **Deuteronomy 6:4-5** – *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength."*
 - b. **Leviticus 19:18** – *"You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord."*
 3. This approach to loving our neighbors works well when we have a healthy sense of self-love – of self-worth.
 - a. Unfortunately, not everyone has that healthy sense of self-love.
 4. Therefore, Jesus gave His disciples a *"new commandment"* based on a different point of comparison.
 - a. **John 13:34-35** – *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one*

another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

b. **John 15:12** – *"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."*

5. Our love for one another is to be modeled after Jesus' love for us.
 - a. We are to love one another with the same depth and intensity as the Lord loves us.
 - b. With the same grace and mercy, and with the same patience and longsuffering as He loves us.
 - c. With a willingness to endure the failures and short-comings we find in one another, just as He graciously and patiently endures the same in us.
- C. Just look at all the examples of the unconditional love Jesus had for His disciples – loving His disciples despite all their shortcomings and failures.
 1. For example, Jesus loved proud, boastful Peter – even as Peter's wavering faith caused him to begin sinking beneath the waves on which he had been standing.
 - a. **Matthew 14:31** – *And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"*

2. Jesus loved His disciples even during those times when they displayed childish pettiness – especially when they argued over which one of them was greatest.
 - a. **Matthew 18:1-4** – *At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, 3 and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."*
3. Jesus loved them despite the fact that they would all desert Him.
 - a. **Matthew 26:31** – *Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'"*
4. Jesus loved His disciples despite the fact that some of them would even openly deny Him.
 - a. **Matthew 26:33-34** – *Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble." 34 Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that*

this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."

5. Jesus loved them even when they were too exhausted to stay awake as He anguished alone in the Garden of Gethsemane.
 - a. **Matthew 26:40-41, 43** – *Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? 41 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." . . . 43 And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy.*
 6. Jesus even loved His betrayer.
 - a. **Matthew 26:48-50** – *Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him." 49 Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed Him. 50 But Jesus said to him, "Friend, why have you come?"*
 7. In fact, John tells us:
 - a. **John 13:1** – *He loved them to the end.*
- D. Can you love like that?
1. Not just loving those who appreciate you and love you for what you do for them, or loving those whom you consider worthy of your love.

2. The question is, can you love someone who shows all the signs of immaturity, and who lets you down and fails you time after time?
 3. Jesus did – and He still does. Because, truth be told, we're just like those disciples.
- E. But as we come to verse 13 in John chapter 15, we see the relationship between Jesus and these men move to a much deeper level.
1. The relationship moves far beyond merely being a disciple, to being a true, genuine, and trusted friend.
- II. In the verses that follow, notice how Jesus begins to reveal a new depth to the way we are to relate to Him – and as He does, Jesus identifies four essential characteristics of true, genuine friendship.
- A. The Lord begins by showing that genuine friendship disregards personal sacrifice.
1. **John 15:13** – *"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."*
 2. Obviously, Jesus was speaking about laying down His life for His disciples – that's the primary interpretation of this verse.
 3. But there's a secondary principle here that relates directly to friendship in general.
 - a. When you have a friend, you will disregard the pain of personal sacrifice.

- b. That's just what friends do.
 - c. True friends are willing to set aside everything to help a friend – never once complaining about how this may inconvenience them.
 - d. And not only that, history shows that true friends demonstrate the depth of their loyalty by even laying down their own lives for their friends.
 - e. Who knows this better than soldiers who have been in the heat of battle? We're always hearing those heroic stories about a soldier giving up his own life to save the lives of his buddies.
4. However, while this kind of self-sacrifice is noteworthy it doesn't even begin to compare to what Jesus did for us.
- a. **Romans 5:6-8** – *For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
 - b. We may lay down our lives for people we love, or for those friends we value and treasure.
 - c. But only Jesus laid down His life for His enemies.

B. But not only does Jesus show that genuine friendship disregards personal sacrifice, He teaches us that genuine friendship is marked by faithfulness.

1. **John 15:14** – *"You are My friends if you do whatever I command you."*
2. Once again, the statement *"do whatever I command you"* is in the present tense – meaning we are the Lord's friends *if* we "keep on doing" what He commands us.
 - a. Jesus demonstrated His friendship with the Father by continually doing the Father's will.
 - b. And now He urges His disciples to continue doing His will just as He continued doing the Father's will.
3. It's clear to see that Jesus is talking about faithfulness – loyalty to Him and to His Father – regardless of cost.
 - a. That's what binds us together with the Lord and with each other.
 - b. We show the Lord that our friendship is real and genuine by doing what He commanded.
4. That same quality of faithfulness and loyalty to the Lord is what bound the apostle Paul and Timothy together in a deep and lasting friendship.
 - a. Paul and Timothy were truly kindred spirits.

- b. **Philippians 2:19-22** – *But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. 20 For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. 21 For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. 22 But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel.*
 - c. Notice how Paul said, "*For I have no one like-minded. . .*" (**v. 20**).
 - d. In the Greek, the phrase literally means "of the same soul," or of an "equal soul."
 - e. Perhaps this is what Aristotle had in mind when he said: "A true friend is one soul in two bodies." (*Five Thousand Quotations for All Occasions*, p. 101)
 - f. I like that statement. Perhaps that's where the idea of having a "soul-mate" comes from – "*one soul in two bodies.*"
5. In a true, genuine friendship, there is a union of beliefs and a sharing of goals and objectives – there is a true kinship between two souls.
- a. Why? Because we both make it our aim in life to be faithful to the Lord in everything we do and say.

C. Jesus not only taught that genuine friendship is marked by faithfulness, He also taught true friends see one another differently.

1. **John 15:15** – *"No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."*
2. In the slave-master relationship there was no room for friendship – slaves and masters didn't hang out together.
 - a. William Barclay writes: "A slave could never be a partner. The slave was defined in Greek law as a living tool. His master never opened his mind to him; the slave had to do what he was told without reason and without exception." (William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, p. 208-9)
3. However, in a true friendship, not only do the parties see one another as equals, there is also complete trust – nothing is secret, nothing is hidden.
 - a. True friends share the most intimate secrets of their souls.
 - b. Therefore, Jesus could say, *"all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."* (**v. 15**).
4. In days of kings and queens there was always an elite group of men in the king's court called "friends of the king."
 - a. They had unrestricted access to the monarch.

- b. They often met with him informally before he saw his political, economic, or military advisors.
5. Just think of what it means to be a friend to Jesus.
- a. We're not slaves – we're friends.
 - b. We have unrestricted access to the Lord of lords, and King of kings.
 - c. We're not sitting on the fringe somewhere, but we're included in His most intimate circle of confidants – His Friends!
- D. And finally, Jesus explained that real, genuine friends develop many of the same character traits and attributes – sort of like when we hear someone say two close friends are "joined at the hip."
- 1. **John 15:16** – *"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you."*
 - 2. Jesus not only personally chose each of His disciples, He also entrusted them *"go and bear fruit."*
 - a. Again, I think we miss the depth of what Jesus meant here when we think of bearing fruit as simply going out and baptizing people.
 - b. Jesus sent these men out as His closest and dearest friends to tell the world about Him and to draw others to Him.

- c. However, His disciples could only accomplish that awesome task when the world saw Jesus in them.
 - d. The fruit these "friends" of Jesus bore was the fruit of the friendship they shared – being of the same mind, of the same soul, being one with Jesus.
 - e. When the world saw Jesus in them, and heard the message of the gospel, lost souls flocked to the kingdom.
4. The same is true for us.
- a. The world needs to see Jesus in us – the world needs to see us bear the fruit of the friendship we share with Jesus – being of the same mind, of the same soul, being one with Jesus.
 - b. They need to see that our friendship with Jesus has forever changed our lives – we have now become just like Him.
 - c. When the world sees that in us, then our message will touch their hearts as it did ours when we first came to Christ.

CONCLUSION:

- I. It's only fitting that Jesus would cap off this short discourse about being a genuine friend with this simple command:
 - A. **John 15:17** – *"These things I command you, that you love one another."*

1. When we look back at the four qualities of a friend, notice how each of them are held together – or bound together – by mutual love.
 - a. Genuine friendship disregards personal sacrifice. Why; because we make sacrifices for those whom we truly love.
 - b. Genuine friendship is marked by faithfulness. Why; because faithfulness and loyalty are only possible where love flourishes.
 - c. Genuine friends see each other differently – we see each other as partners, and equals with whom we can share the most intimate secrets of the soul. Why; because love fosters trust – knowing that a true friend will never betray us.
 - d. And finally, genuine friends develop the same character and attributes. Why; because we love others for who they are – we see in them the character and attributes we want to have in our own lives.
- B. I can't imagine a world without friends – without enjoying the close intimate friendship we have as brothers and sisters in Christ.
 1. But even more than that, I can't imagine a world without Jesus as my Friend, and yours.
 - a. A friend who disregarded His own personal sacrifice and died on the cross for you.

- b. A friend who simply wants you to be faithful to Him all the days of your life.
 - c. A friend with whom you can share the most intimate secrets of your soul.
 - d. And a friend who has the all qualities and characteristics you want in your own life – someone you truly want to model in every way.
2. Do you have that kind of friend in Jesus?
- a. Can you truly say He's your friend?
 - b. Or can you say that He sees you as His friend?
3. If not, I can only think of two reasons why Jesus may not be your friend.
- a. One reason could be that you've never become His friend by keeping His commandments – such as His command to repent of your sins, confess your faith in Him, be baptized for the remission of your sins, and raised with Him to walk in a newness of life.
 - b. Or, perhaps you have failed to maintain that friendship by being unfaithful to His commandments – by failing to live a godly life as His disciple.
4. If either is true in your case, the good news is that you can become His friend today:

- a. By either coming to Him in obedience to the gospel...
- b. Or by coming back to Him through repentance, confession and prayer.