

"THE FRIEND OF GOD"

"But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend." Isaiah 41:8.

"And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God." James 2:23.

A friend is a person who is intimately known, respected, esteemed, and loved by another. Friendship is the mutual attachment of two persons who are thus known and loved. Because Christ realized all the meanings and implications of friendship, to Him friendship was of inestimable value. In fact, friendship is one of the very best things in life. For us, friendship makes life rich and full, bright and joyous, tender and sweet. Perhaps it is the greatest boon of human circumstances. Friendship makes life worth living. When Mrs. Elizabeth Barrett Browning said to Charles Kingley, "Tell me the secret of your life that I may make mine beautiful too," he replied, "I have a friend!" That was the secret that made all the difference. Constantius, the father of Constantine the Great, said, "My treasures are my friends." Plautus spoke a great truth when he said, "Nothing is there more friendly to a man than a friend in need."

Everybody needs true and faithful friends. It matters not in what condition man is found, whether in riches or in poverty, whether ignorant and rude or highly civilized and educated, he needs the friendship of one or more of his fellow creatures. Friendship is a necessity in our lives. A true friend advises justly assists readily, takes all patiently, defends courageously, and continues a friend unchangingly.

True friendship brings comfort. It has been said that "No recipe openeth a heart but a true friend; to whom you may impart griefs, joys, fears, hopes, suspicions, counsels, and whatsoever lieth upon the heart to oppress it, in a kind of civil confession."

True friendship provides comradeship. It is a great help to us in our difficulties and distresses. It also brings counsel. Talking with a friend gives great satisfaction of mind. No friendship is worth the name unless it elevates, and contributes to nobility of conduct and strength of character. Nothing in this world is more delightful than a true friend, who kindly receives and returns our affections, and who is faithful to us in all of our true interests. In writing about a friend, Edgar A. Guest said:

"A friend is one who stands to share
Your every touch of grief and care.
He comes by chance, but stays by choice,
Your praises he is quick to voice.

No grievous fault or passing whim
Can make an enemy of him.
And though your need be great or small,
His strength is yours throughout it all.

No matter where your path may turn,
Your welfare is his chief concern.
No matter what your dream may be,
He prays your triumph soon to see.

There is no wish your tongue can tell,
But what it is your friend's as well.
The life of him who has a friend,
Is double-guarded to the end."

Although it would be extremely interesting and very inspiring and helpful to discuss the general subject of friendship, that is not my purpose in this message. Instead, I want to speak of the highest and holiest friendship that is known, namely, that which exists between a believer in Christ and God Himself. This discussion, therefore, will be based upon the friendship between God and Abraham.

Abraham was called "The Friend of God." Much that is honorable and commendable is recorded about Abraham in the Word of God, but nothing that is equal to this statement. God certainly honored Abraham greatly when He called him His friend. What greater honor could there be than this? Abraham believed in his Friend and God reckoned it to him for righteousness. How wonderful to be a friend of the Almighty!

Human friendship is something to be held dear. To have a friend is to have one of the sweetest gifts that life can bring. Human friendship is precious, but friendship with God is something infinitely greater. God can be just as real to us as any earthly friend. In order to have a friendship to develop there must be a frequent association of two individuals. Then, too, friendship cannot all be on one side. In this particular instance it is intended that we should know that while God was Abraham's friend, Abraham was also God's friend. He received and returned the friendship.

I. The Ground of This Friendship.

Friendships are not accidents; trace them back and you will find that they are rooted in personal affinities. The friendship between God and Abraham was grounded in the following:

1. Mutual trust.

To say that we do not trust our friends is a contradiction in terms. As an expression of His affectionate confidence in Abraham God said, "Shall I hide from Abraham the thing which I do?" God was considering the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; but how could He conceal the intention from Abraham, His friend? He, therefore, told him of the judgment which He was about to execute on the wicked cities. Abraham believed God, and he was called the Friend of God.

Think of what a burden was laid on the faith of the patriarch. He was called upon to leave his home and go forth into a strange land, not knowing whither he went. There were some things which Abraham knew, and there were other things which he did not know. He knew God, and, for action, that knowledge was sufficient. Since God had called him, he was ready to obey. But he did not know where his obedience would lead him. That issue he left with God. His attitude is expressed beautifully in our noble hymn:

"I do not ask to see the distant scene!
One step enough for me."

The man of faith does not demand to understand everything before he will obey. His attitude is that he knows enough, and will venture. First, he knows God. Secondly, he knows that God is calling him. Thirdly, he knows that God will never lead him astray. That knowledge is enough for action. Go anywhere with God. There cannot be any risks in obedience to God. Stake everything upon God and He will see you through.

When his son, Isaac, had reached young manhood, God commanded Abraham to offer him as a sacrifice. In this trial of his faith, Abraham dared to believe that God could find a way to keep His promise. Faith was the grace in which Abraham excelled. He always believed what God told him. True friends always believe each other. Any man who does not believe and accept God's Word is not a friend of God. Such a faith as Abraham's justifies from sin, purifies the heart, and regulates the life.

2. Mutual Communion .

God and Abraham not only trusted each other implicitly, but they talked with each other freely. They visited and had communion with each other. Secrets were disclosed. The satisfaction of having a friend is that we can talk to him or to her, reveal our troubles, and let that friend share our joys. When we are about to enter upon a new enterprise, we like first to consult our true friend or friends about it. There is not a care of the heart which we cannot and should not take to the Heavenly Father. It is possible to live in such close fellowship with Christ that we will not have any doubt as to what He would have us to do about it.

Compacts were entered into by Abraham and God. On certain grand occasions we read: "The Lord made a covenant with Abram." God had intimate communion with him. He said: "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward." What a glorious privilege it is to pour out to God everything that is in one's heart! The consciousness that one is reconciled to God, and has in Him a Father and a Friend, sheds over the mind a tranquillity which excels the excitement of worldly joy.

3. Mutual service.

True friends are always ready to undertake hard things for those who are truly their friends. By that standard test the faith of Abraham. There came a time in the working out of God's plan that He needed someone to leave his home and his kindred and go into a strange land, and Abraham went without any hesitation. Then there came a time when the honor of God required that one should give up the well-watered valley of the Jordan, and lead his flock out into the plain where it looked as though the animals might be lost; and Abraham who had the right of first choice yielded it to his ambitious and selfish nephew, Lot. That means that when business interests and the revealed will of God come into apparent conflict the will of God is to have the right of way. Still further on there came a day when God said to the patriarch, I want your son, your only son, Isaac, and I want you to offer him up as a burnt offering on a mountain that I will show you. Without a moment's hesitation Abraham prepared to obey the command. Abraham always tried to do what God told him. Is it any wonder then that God called him His Friend?

II. The Guarantees Of This Friendship.

1. Security.

"Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield." It would be difficult to imagine a life more beset with perils than that of the patriarch. He was living in the midst

of strong and hostile tribes to whom he must have appeared as an invader, and to whom he must have been a great temptation because of his wealth. And yet he remained unmolested for a hundred years or more. Abraham's God is our God, and his Friend is our Friend, and the pledge that He made to Abraham He has made to you and me.

2. Success.

When we undertake a work for God we need not have any fear as to the outcome. To Abraham God said, "I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward."

III. The Glory Of this Friendship.

To be one of God's friends is to possess the highest honor that heaven can bestow.

1. It means reconciliation with God.

After one has been reconciled to God, he can look toward Him and see a smile on His face. Our friends live in our hearts, and the heart of God is the home of His friends.

2. It guarantees likeness to God here, and a perfect likeness to Him hereafter. Here,

- (1) We shall be humble in spirit.
- (2) We shall resemble Him in character.
- (3) We shall have confidence in His administration.
- (4) We shall have zeal for His honor.
- (5) We shall enjoy the fellowship of His friends.
- (6) We shall delight to think of Him.
- (7) We shall strive to please Him.

3. Won't you become His friend now?

Open the door of your heart and admit Him as your best Friend. He is just that, so let Him in.