

James' Bond

The Call of Duty and Devotion

December 8, 2024

Today we're gearing up to go way beyond merely believing and serving!



But before we get to that, answer me this: **Are you God's friend?**



I know He's yours; and *what a friend we have in Jesus!* But are you *His*? He was called the *Friend of sinners*. But, **would you be called the friend of the Sinless?** It's *easy* for me to get serving and even studying confused with closeness. It can be. But only *intentionally*. Because **it's so easy for servants to lose sight of the actual objective**. Last Sunday, we saw Martha serving Jesus when **she should've been sitting to hear Him** (like her sister Mary); and then Mary, sitting when **she should've been running to see Him** (like Martha). And we then saw and heard how **our Lord of lords demands we be best of friends**. Which entails **learning and discerning balancing serving and bonding**. Which is why:



Paul, **[calls himself]** a **bondservant** of Jesus Christ, – Romans 1:1 NKJ

A *bondservant* was **a slave who'd been set free, but desired to keep serving a loving master** and his family, as a *faithful friend* and an *adopted family member*. Here are the OT instructions:

If you buy a Hebrew servant **[they often sold themselves temporarily to repay a debt]** ... in the *seventh* [year] he shall *go out* free and pay nothing. – Exodus 21:5-6 NKJ

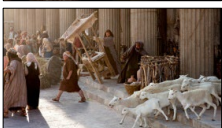
And when you send him away free ... you shall supply him liberally from your flock, from your threshing floor, and from your winepress. ... [And if] **[having no need to stay]** he says to you, 'I will *not* go away from you,' because **he loves you and your house** ... you shall take an *awl* and thrust it through **[i.e. pierce]** his ear to the door, and he **[by his choice]** shall be your servant forever. **[Through a bond of love]** – Deuteronomy 15:12-17 NKJ



Ever run into an old school teacher, and feel *compelled* to call them by their *Mr.* or *Mrs.* name – cuz it feels *weird* to call 'em by their *first* name? I've seen my grade-school principle, *Don Zorn* a number of times; and I *always* call him *Mr. Zorn*. And he *always* tells me to call him *Don*. The *last* time I saw him, I *reflexively* said "Mr. Zorn!" And he *laughed* and said, "How old are you?!"

I guess **it's time to grow up and get less formal**. Which doesn't mean **less respectful**, just **more relational**. When the boys didn't grasp Jesus' teaching, they were *afraid* to ask Him to explain himself, (Mk 9:32) because they *revered* Him as the *Rabbi/Teacher* and *Lord/Master*, but they didn't relate to Him as the *friend of sinners* – which was a name given to Him by the *Pharisees* as an *insult*. It was most likely *triggered* by the sinner-dinner hosted by His *despised, tax-collecting disciple*.

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, *many* tax collectors and "sinners" [like harlots and gluttons and drunks; oh my!] came and ate with Him and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked His disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" ... Jesus said, [Cuz] "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But [why don't you] go and learn what this means: [in Hosea 6:6] 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." – Matthew 9:10-13 NIV



And it's not *merely* a call of duty, but *first* and *foremost*, devotion. Remember when Jesus *chased* the *sacrificial animals* out of the Temple? (Jn 2:14-16) You see, **they took pride in pleasing God by honoring their religious duties.** But God makes it *clear* in the *verse* Jesus quotes, that **it isn't the sacrifice that He desires** – as though He *needs* to be *appeased* – **it's the opportunity to show mercy that pleases Him.** Which is why the *Micah*, the *prophet* quoted in the *Nativity* story regarding the *Messiah's birth* in *Bethlehem*, (Mt 2:5; Mic 5:2) had *this* to say about the *notion* of the Lord *desiring* a *sacrifice* for its *own sake*.

Will the Lord be *pleased* with *thousands of rams*, with *ten thousand rivers of oil*? *Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression*, the fruit of *MY BODY* for the *sin* of my *soul*? He has *showed* you, O man, what is *good*. [And *pleasing to the Lord*] ... To *act justly* and to *love [His] mercy* and to *walk humbly [showing mercy]* with your God. – Micah 6:6-8 NIV

Therefore, when *He* came into the *world*, He said: "*Sacrifice and offering* You did *not desire*, but [because *You do desire to fully display Your mercy*] a BODY You have prepared for ME. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no *pleasure*. [It was all about the *occasion they afforded for offering Your mercy*] Then I said, '*Behold*, I have *come*— in the *volume* of the *book* it is written of *Me*— to *do Your will*, O [merciful] God.'" – Hebrews 10:5-7 NKJ

That's Psalm 40:6-8, with a *twist*. The line "*a body You have prepared for Me*," is *way different* from the *original*. Not even *close*. Cuz it's *revealing* the way His *body* was *prepared*: "*My ears You have opened*"; literally: *pierced*. Because *God the Son* not only became a *man* – He became a *bondservant*. And since *we've* now been *prepared* as His *body*:

Let *this mind* be in you which was *also* in Christ Jesus, who, *being* in the *form* of *God*, [obviously] did not consider it *robbery* to be *equal* with *God*, but [still] *made Himself* of no *reputation*, [among the *religious rulers*, by] *taking the form of a bondservant*, and *coming* in the *likeness* of *men*. And being *found* in *appearance* as a *man*, [those in *power* wouldn't *believe* that *God* would *become flesh*; so] He [1] *humbled Himself* [as a *bondservant of God*] and [2] became *obedient* [to the *Father's will*] to the *point* of *death*, [to *display His mercy*] even the *death* of the *cross*. – Philippians 2:5-8 NKJ

For [as *prophesied* in Psalm 22:16] dogs have *surrounded* Me; the *congregation* of the *wicked* has *enclosed* Me. [And] *They pierced My hands and My feet* – Psalm 22:16 NKJ

And so, at Matthew's *sinner dinner*, He said, "*go and learn* what this *means*: 'I desire *mercy*, not *sacrifice*'". Because **He prefers to hang with those who are aware of their sin, and aren't afraid to get real with Him,** and actually *enjoy spending time* with Him to *deepen* their *devotion* to Him.

No matter *how far* they have to go. So when those *religious rulers* tried to soil Him by His *sinful associations*, He called 'em on it, in front of a *multitude* of those listening to Him.

"The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a *glutton* and a *drunkard*, a *friend* of tax collectors and *sinners*.' [Well they got it *half right*] But *wisdom* is proved *right* by her *actions*." [Not words] – Matthew 11:19 NIV

[And] Jesus [later] said to them, "I tell you the *truth*, the *tax collectors* and the *prostitutes* are entering the kingdom of God [way] ahead of you." – Matthew 21:31 NIV

They don't claim He's a friend to sinners. He is of course. But that's *benevolent*, and doesn't make their case. **They're saying, "He's a friend of sinners.** It's not *benevolence*. He *likes* 'em hanging around." And they *obviously spoke a profound truth: He likes to hang with the likes of us.* So much so, that **He hung for us, as a bondservant devoted to the duty of mercy.**



[And, as a result] We were *restored to friendship* with God by the *death* of His Son – Romans 5:10 NLT

Because our *Creator not only* wants to be our *friend* as *Savior*, but as everlasting *Father* as well! "The Message" paraphrases it *this way*:

Now that we have actually received this amazing friendship with God, we are no longer content to simply say it in plodding prose. We sing and shout our praises to God through Jesus, the Messiah! – Romans 5:10 TMNT

We sing about *His devotion to us*, but **would we have reason enough to sing about your devotion to Him?** Let that soak in. **We're called to friendship with God**, by His *grace*, through our *faith*, in His *sacrifice* for our *sin*. Which is *why*, the night before the cross, He, *now so famously*, said:

"I no longer call you servants, because a master doesn't *confide* in his servants. Now you are My *friends*, since I have told you everything the Father told Me." – John 15:14-16 NIV

God wants us to go from a *servant level* of *doing our duty* because He *commands* it, to a *companion level* of *motivation* that comes from *understanding* and *agreeing* with His *heart*. The goal is for a *deep sense of relational collaboration* that *supersedes a shallow sense of religious duty*, so that our motivation for obedience will become **less and less as oblivious servant, and more and more as intimate friend.** *Mercy over formality!* Because the moment *His best desire* becomes *our best desire*, we become *best friends*. As believers, **we can confuse belief-based actions with bonding**, becoming **skilled in doing our duty and serving**, while remaining **unskilled in deepening our devotion and bonding.** *Martha* opened her *home*; but *Mary* opened her *ears*. And then *Martha* opened her *mouth!*

And she went up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not *care* that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are *anxious* and *troubled* about *many things*, [that seem so necessary] but [when "you are *anxious* and *troubled*," only] one thing is [actually] *necessary*. [And] *Mary* has *chosen* the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." – Luke 10:40-42 ESV

What'd she choose? **To ignore the distractions rather than Jesus.** And she *also* chose **listening like an admiring ally rather than serving like an annoying adversary.** Friends certainly *serve* friends. But Martha was *working* herself into a *lather!* While *Mary* was *grounding* herself.

[Because] He *alone* is my *Rock* and my *salvation*; He is my *fortress*, I will *not* be *shaken*. ...
[If you] *Trust* in Him at *all times* ... [and] *pour out* your *hearts* to Him – Psalm 62:6-8 NIV



Closeness with Christ is by choice, not accident. One of *life's* great *joys* is when *children* mature. And mother-or-father and daughter-or-son *grow* from a parent-child relationship, into a blossoming friendship. *Our* Father not only *shares* that *desire*, and *feels* that *joy*, **He created us in order to grow in closeness with us.** Which requires something deeper than a *daily* devotional. Because, **He deserves to be more than a scheduled appointment.** If *devotions* feel like a *chore*, you're *doing* it *wrong*. Because, **Jesus isn't a job.** There's no *angel* waiting in the *wings* to *stamp* your *spiritual time card*. **The righteous serve from the heart,** because, "we were *restored* to *friendship* with *God* by the *death* of His *Son*," (Rom 5:10) which makes it a *bond* of *love* of the *highest order*. Like:

James, a *bond-servant* of *God* [the *Father*] and of the *Lord* *Jesus* *Christ* – James 1:1 NAS

That's *right*, we need *James' bond!* The *operative difference being*, that:

The *righteous* will *never* be *shaken* – Psalm 112:6 NIV

There's a *big* difference between *believing* and *bonding*. Even the *demons* believe. (Jms 2:19) But **only the likeminded bond.** Quick test: When *others* *wrong* you, but then make *amends*, **do you delight more in the apology or the opportunity to forgive?** We'll *work* on it.

For *judgment* is without *mercy* to the *one* who has *shown* no [desire to show] *mercy*.
[And showing] *Mercy* [clearly] *triumphs* over [receiving] *judgment*. – James 2:12-13 NKJ

There's a misconception that spending time with God means being alone with God. But that's not how *real* friendships *work*. And I'm pretty *sure* He likes to get *out* of the *house*. So, **we can't stop talking when we start working or playing.** I'd much rather *share* an *experience* with someone, or *sit* in *relaxed silence*, than *force* *awkward conversation*. When we're *told* to:

Pray continually ... for *this* is *God's will* for you – 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 NIV

We're not *talking* about what we *think* of as *formal prayers*. *Thank* the *Lord!* I'm *not* *wired* for lengthy *talking-prayer*. I get too *antsy*. And I *run out* of things to *say*. **He just wants constant, open, communication.** The more *casual* and *normal* the *better*. **He's not looking for a quota, just a chance to speak.** But it's a *balance*. Because **our friendship can't come at the expense of our reverence.** We can't *allow* our *familiarity* to *displace* His *authority* as our *Lord* and *Creator*.

Friendship with God is *reserved* for those who *revere* Him. – Psalm 25:14 TLB

Just don't *call* Him *Mr. Christ*.