

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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This is My Friend

Charles Fry

One hundred and forty-three years ago, a fellow named Charles W. Fry wrote a hymn entitled “The Lily of The Valley.” The opening line is, “I have found a friend in Jesus; he’s everything to me.” That sentiment of friendship with Jesus turns up in quite a few Christian songs, singing of “friendship with Jesus, fellowship divine,” or “I’ll be a friend to Jesus,” or “Jesus is all the world to me... he’s my friend.” Friendship with Jesus is a common theme in Christian songs.

During his ministry in the flesh, some of Jesus’ critics described him as “a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (**Matthew 11:19**), a description he did not repudiate. On the night of his betrayal, he reminded his disciples that “I have called you friends” (**John 15:15**), right after saying that “Greater love has no one than this: that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you” (**John 15:13-14**). Jesus was about to demonstrate his total commitment by dying for his friends, both those disciples there and then and everyone afterward who believes in him and obeys his commands. This is a sound Biblical basis for thinking of Jesus as a friend to Christians.

Probably, though, the actual source of Charles W. Fry saying, “I have found a friend in Jesus” is the **Song of Songs**, where the bride says of the groom,

His mouth is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable.

This is my beloved and this is my friend,

O daughters of Jerusalem (Song of Songs 5:16).

In the **Song of Songs**, the bride describes herself as “a lily of the valley” and “a rose of Sharon” (**Song of Songs 2:1**), but numerous songs used by the church have taken that language as descriptive of Christ, the groom, thinking of the **Song of Songs** as an allegory, and multitudes of interpreters have read the Song as an allegory of Christ and the church. From that perspective, it would be the church or the Christian who is “a

rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys,” which is a self-deprecating reference to being a very ordinary flower found growing among thousands of similar flowers. His response is that she is “a lily among brambles” (**Song of Songs 2:2**), radiant in beauty that surpasses all around her. This is indeed Jesus’s perception of his church, his bride, having died for her to make her radiant and glorious, clean and beautiful (**Ephesians 5:25-27**), the epitome of what a husband should do for his wife.

Despite some misreading of the Song on the part of several songwriters, most Christian singers will see beauty in the authors’ intentions when applying the “lily of the valley” or “rose of Sharon” to the Lord Jesus. He is indeed beautiful

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beyond description and yet presents himself to us simply. He is raised in glory, but he came in humility (**1 Corinthians 15:43**), and in every way really has proven himself a friend to all who will receive him (**John 1:12**).

If, as the bride said of her groom, “this is my friend,” what does friendship with Jesus entail? There are many ways to describe friendship, including companionship and shared interests and trustworthiness. Friends enjoy being together and are glad to know each other. In **Proverbs**, we also have the observation that “faithful are the wounds of a friend” (**27:6**), meaning that a friend will do and say what’s for your own good, even if it hurts. And again, “the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel” (**Proverbs 27:9**). Everyone needs to know someone like that, who is supportive and honest, not ignoring problems but meeting them head-on together, just as

continued on the next page...

Continued from front page: "This is My Friend"

Jesus offered to do with anyone who would accept his yoke and learn from him (**Matthew 11:28-30**).

For most people, one of the great benefits of friendship is having someone to talk to, sharing hopes and fears, pain and joy. Jesus is that sort of friend to whom you can say anything and know that he can handle it. He became human like us so that he can be *"a merciful and faithful high priest... in that he himself has suffered, being tempted, he is able to aid those who are tempted"* (**Hebrews 2:17-18**). Unlike every Jewish high priest in Jerusalem in the days of Jesus and the apostles, Jesus is utterly sympathetic and approachable for his brethren, followers of God. He understands and responds to our hopes and our fears, joys and pains. Again,

we have a great high priest... Jesus the Son of God... [who] was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need" (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Jesus, the great high priest, is not aloof or distant but rather is sympathetic and approachable. "This is my friend."

When Paul suffered bouts of illness with what he called *"my thorn in the flesh,"* he *"pleaded with the Lord three times."* In Paul's letters, the Lord is almost always Jesus Christ, and when he wrote of this struggle in **2 Corinthians 12:8-10**, he's very clear that he means he took it up with Jesus. The Lord replied that *"My grace is sufficient for you, and my strength is made perfect in weakness,"* which Paul elaborated on by saying, *"I will rather boast in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me."* The Lord whose grace and power are sufficient, to whom Paul pleaded three times, is the Lord Jesus Christ, the same Lord who is a faithful friend to all who will receive him and obey his commands, sympathetic and helpful. "This is my friend."

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Learning from the Pharisees

Blake Stanley

Why this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! (John 9:30).

The Pharisees were in willful disbelief. A man, well known to the community, had been cured of a lifetime of blindness. His neighbors and many others were used to the sight of this man begging, and now, here he was, able to see. This created a stir in the community. People were talking about this miracle, and eventually, news reached the Pharisees. They were left confused for the miracle had happened on the Sabbath. This created division among the Pharisees, with some claiming the healer was a sinner to have healed on the Sabbath, but others wondered how then a sinner could perform a miracle.

So, they began a series of questions. First, they brought in the man who had been healed. After questioning him, they did not believe that he had even been blind. Next, they brought in his

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parents, who confirmed their son's former condition, but being intimidated by the leaders, they would not say how their son had been healed. Still unsatisfied, the Pharisees lastly called the healed man before them. **John 9:24-34** records this final exchange. It reads as a tense conversation. The Pharisees sought to discredit both the man and his healer, calling them both sinners. The blind man, as the words quoted above note, proclaimed his wonder at how the Pharisees could claim that anyone other than a man sent by God could have performed such a miracle.

As a reader of this passage, it is easy to share the healed man's marvel at the Pharisees' reaction. This man had been born blind. The Pharisees had confirmed this through questioning his parents. There were witnesses to the miracle they had likely heard from. The evidence was so clear that the Pharisees didn't even deny that it had happened. They gave God the glory for

a miracle (**verse 24**), but denied that Jesus, a sinner in their mind, had anything to do with it.

This happens regularly in the gospels with the Pharisees. From the moment they go out to the wilderness to see John the Baptist, they are in conflict with the message of Christ. As Christ's notoriety expands throughout the region, their opposition crescendos to the point where they deliver Him to Pilate to be crucified. They do this despite the mounting evidence that Christ was not only sent by God but also is the Son of God.

Given their actions, it is easy for us to react to each passage. They appear in the same way the healed man did standing before the Pharisees as they denied his healer was from God: marveling, confused, and, at times, even disgusted.

Those are appropriate reactions. In some ways, the Pharisees represent the worst of men: they conspired, they manipulated, and they killed an innocent man — the Son of God, attested to them by signs, miracles, and wonders — to protect their position among the people. Disgust is warranted.

But the story of the Pharisees within the life of Christ is not there for their condemnation. It is not there so people can look back at them with shamefully shaking heads and wagging fingers. Like all scripture, it is, in part, there for learning. Among other things, the Pharisees are character studies that reveal sins prevalent in all men. It shows Christians what they may face in the world, and it also reveals struggles that they themselves may have. In that way, everyone must be willing to see themselves in the Pharisees. An unwillingness to do so is to deny that they, themselves, could be them. This was a mistake the Pharisees had made, as Christ pointed out to them in **Matthew 23:29-30**,

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, "If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets."

Christ goes on in the following verses to point out that the Pharisees were exactly what they were condemning. By persecuting Christ and, subsequently, His disciples, they were the very men they claimed they would never be. The men they claimed they never could be. The same mistake can be made today by focusing on the Pharisees' faults — *their* sins, *their* blindness, and *their* guilt — while never considering how we may share in some of those faults or giving credence to the idea

that maybe we are not so far from them.

This is hard to do in part because the Pharisees' actions were truly heinous, so heinous that no Christian wants to see themselves in them. But at the base of their actions are sins common to all men: pride, envy, jealousy, self-interest, wanting to look good in the eyes of others, prejudice, and an unwillingness to listen. While the Pharisees may have had those sins embedded in their hearts at exceptional depth, there is nothing exceptional about those sins. Honest self-reflection by anyone would likely reveal the same or similar sins. Broadening our view of the Pharisees beyond their guilt and considering in what ways we may be like them may reveal sins within ourselves or blindness in our hearts, bringing us closer to our Lord.

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The Power of the Gospel

William J. Hensley

Without a doubt, those who read this article will acknowledge that the Gospel of Christ has great power—power to bring salvation. Paul said, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation"* (**Romans 1:16**).

However, of the many who realize that power to save, but few will think of the power of unity as a part of man's salvation. It is this look at the gospel power that is found to be of great interest. Before Jesus died outside of Jerusalem, those who believed in God were divided not alone among the sects of the Jews but even among the Gentiles who were (not in agreement with the Jews); there were those who acknowledged God. In the prayer of Jesus in **John the 17th chapter**, we see the theme of unity. Certainly, Christ prayed for the unity of both Jew and Gentile, as well as for the oneness that comes in the life that turns from sin. Of course, all of this unity is found in Christ. See **Galatians 3:28**, *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."*

Not alone were men actually made free from sin by obedience to the gospel teaching, but they were brought into a state of unity with one another. This is clearly understood when we see the unity first at Jerusalem at Pentecost, and also



Please check your expiration date!

Continued from page 3: "The Power of the Gospel"

as the city was filled with the doctrine of Christ. In **Acts 2:42** it is stated that there was unity of action among the baptized believers: *"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and in fellowship, and breaking of bread and in prayers."* Then in **Acts 4:32**, it is revealed that *"the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul."* This same teaching brought men and women, Jew and Greek, bond and free into Christ and thus into one body. The power of the gospel made this unity possible. No other power could do this.

The interesting factor in this consideration is to be found in the very simplistic teaching used to bring this about. All complex human endeavors would have failed to save man from sin and from disunion as well. In our present age, we need more emphasis placed upon this simple proclamation of the inspired word of God. By preaching this gospel, we will lead many to Christ. By a constant announcing of the gospel, the unity of believers can also be realized. We do not omit the Christian life as an example of the applied gospel, but we add this to the words to be spoken publicly and privately. Upon this basis alone can true salvation be realized as well as the unity of all believers.

Editor's Note: The article above was originally published in the February, 1961 issue of The Gospel Message. You can find this, and other archived articles, at www.gospelmessage.net.

Glory to God!

The church which meets in **Excelsior Springs, MO** rejoiced when **Dalton, Drake, and Katelyn Wilson** were baptized for the remission of their sins on December 23.

Special Meetings

2024 Meetings

March 16-17.....Section Church of Christ (Osage City, KS)
June 8-9.....Vandalia, IA
June 17-20.....Shaver Lake, CA
July 1-5.....Midwest Bible Campout, Eminence, MO
July 20-26.....Murray Road, Lee's Summit, MO
September 29.....Braymer, MO
October 4-6.....Fall Campout, Unionville, MO

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