

Friendships in Heaven

by J.R. Miller

The sermon explores the nature of friendships in heaven, emphasizing the importance of true love and union of hearts, and encouraging listeners to cultivate friendships that will last for eternity.

Scripture: Matthew 22:30, John 15:12-13, Romans 13:10, 1 Corinthians 13:8, Philippians 1:3-5, Colossians 3:14, Hebrews 12:1, 1 Peter 4:17, 1 John 4:7, Revelation 21:4

Topics: "Friendship", "Eternal Relationships"

Description

J.R. Miller explores the concept of friendships in heaven, emphasizing that while earthly relationships like marriage do not continue in the same form, the love and bonds formed through genuine connections will endure. He reflects on the joy of reuniting with loved ones in the heavenly family, which encompasses all the redeemed across ages and cultures. Miller encourages believers to cultivate true friendships on earth, rooted in love and unity in Christ, as these will be the relationships that last into eternity. He reassures that love, being immortal, will not be lost but transformed in the heavenly realm, allowing for a deeper communion with both earthly and heavenly friends.

Transcript

"The family of God!" 1 Peter 4:17

There is a story of a ship whose crew were rendered unfit for their duties, by coming in sight of their home-land. For many years they had been sailing in foreign waters. At last they came near their native hills. From the look-out came the shout, "Home!" Instantly all the men were wild with excitement. Some climbed the masts, some stood on deck and strained their eyes to catch a glimpse of dear scenes. Every heart beat with mingled hope and joy. Old memories came thronging back. Wives and children and parents and homes were there! In their delight, the men left their posts, and the ship was at the mercy of the waves! Other sailors had to be gotten from the shore, to bring the vessel to her landing!

Somewhat like this, would it be with us in this world--if we could see heaven and its inhabitants, our beloved godly ones among them, and all the glories of that blessed home! We would be unfit for our duties here on earth. In our excitement of joy--we would become unfit for our earthly tasks. It is better that we should not know all about heaven. It is mercy which draws the veil before our eyes.

Yet in our life here, the question continually arises, "Will it all end when death parts us?" My father and mother lived together more than forty years, until they seemed to have only one soul, so closely had their

lives blended. They thought alike, talked alike, almost looked alike! My father died first, and after that my mother's loneliness was pathetic to behold. She did not complain; she was sweetly submissive to God's will. But her thoughts were not on earth. She pined for the companionship she had lost. "I want to go home too!" she would sometimes say. In a little time--she slipped away. Did they meet again, those two gentle lovers, who had lived together so long that their two souls had blended into one?

Some Sadducees came to Jesus with a question: A woman had been married seven times: which of the seven men would have her as his wife after the resurrection? The Master answered clearly, "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead--will neither marry nor be given in marriage."

What is the teaching? Very clearly this that marriage is a relation only for this earthly life, and that it will not be re-established in the heavenly state. Nor will the marriage ties of earth be resumed as such in heaven. The husband and wife will not meet again as husband and wife in the new society of heaven.

Does this teaching startle anyone? Does it mean that two who have lived together on earth as husband and wife, in tender and holy relations, praying side by side, and walking together in the way of God's commandments, shall not meet together in heaven and resume their close fellowship? No; Christ said not one word which can be construed to mean this. Husband and wife will not resume the marriage relation there--but if their hearts are knit together here in pure and holy love--they will meet there in holy love. Certainly those who have had so much in common, who have suffered together, toiled together, sacrificed together, sorrowed hand in hand, if their lives are truly knit the one to the other--will take up again the old threads of love and go on forever weaving them into a web of imperishable beauty.

Note a few things about the heavenly life: One is, that in Heaven--all the redeemed shall dwell together as one family. The purest earthly home is imperfect. The fellowships of heaven--will be immeasurably sweeter than those of earth. It will be the perfect family! While your associations with your earthly kindred will be close and tender in proportion to the closeness and depth of your affection here--the heavenly family will embrace a far wider circle. You will dwell with the saints of all ages, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs. All who have ever lived a godly life--will be your brothers and sisters! What a privilege it will be to commune with those whose lives so brightened the world while they were in it, and whose influence has lived since they have gone, a perpetual blessing in this world! What a wonderful company it will be, that complete company of the redeemed, gathered from all lands and from all ages!

Think of all those who have blessed the world: the poets who have sung the world's pure songs, the artists whose pictures have been inspirations to so many souls, the missionaries who have carried Christ's name into the dark places, the mothers who have lived to train children for God, the great men who have led in the world's reformations, the sweet lives which have been like gentle, fragrant flowers in this earth's wildernesses, the holy ones who have resisted temptations, keeping themselves unspotted from the world, those who have suffered wrong in silence, those who have lived deeply, learning life's lessons well and then teaching those lessons in books that throb with human sympathy, in songs that teach others how to live and how to love. How our feelings overmaster us--as we try to think of that great family of God, of which all the children of God are members! All the precious things of human life, gathered out of all the ages, shall be there. Not a gleam of true beauty that has ever flashed its beam in this world's darkness has been lost.

Think of living, even here on earth--in a company, a community, composed of the one thousand best, noblest, most holy and most godly people to be gathered from all lands; every life a song, every face bearing the beauty of Christ, every character rich with the fruits of the Spirit--love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, goodness; every spirit full of the best human life, sweetened by heavenly grace. It would be supreme happiness to be one of such company, comprising the best people of this earth. Heaven will be far better than this--for it will have in it the best of all ages--not as they were here, with earthly limitations, only fragments of beauty appearing in them; marred, too, by sinful things and by human frailties; but made perfect in love, in holiness, in all Christian graces and virtues. The "family of God" will comprise all the redeemed of all ages and countries, the spirits of all just men made perfect. While we shall lose nothing out of the life of friendship we have lived here, keeping every friend--we shall gain immeasurably by having the godly of all ages, for our brothers and sisters.

But someone says, "I do not care for this great family, this circle that takes in all the redeemed. I want my own. I never cared to have many friends. I want my own mother and father, my sister, my child, my husband, my wife--my little circle--I want these to be my friends in heaven." Well, you will have these, if they and you are truly united in Christ in this world.

Love is the sum of all life. From Genesis to Revelation, men are taught to love. God's own character is painted in one word "God is love." Then we are taught to be like God, to seek the restoring of the image of God in our souls. All duty is summed up in the commandments in the one word, "You shall love!" Jesus came to reveal God, and He bade His followers to love. By this mark, He said, all men should know that they were His disciples, because they were loving. We say John reached the highest place among the disciples, and was dearest to Christ, and nearest, and John was the disciple of love. Love blossomed out in his life, in its finest beauty. Thus all Christian culture, is toward love.

Home is Christ's first school, and home life is simply learning to love. Friendship is another school. Friendship is discipline. With all its frictions, its anxieties, its thought, its toil, its self-denial, its training in patience, forbearance, and meekness--it is simply a long lesson in loving. All through the New Testament, we are taught to love. The fruits of the Spirit named by Paul are merely branches of love, parts of the lesson of loving. "Love is the fulfilling of the law." If we have learned to love truly, purely, loving not in word only but in deed--we have met all the requirements of God's commandments. The whole work of the Bible and of the divine Spirit in us--is to build up love in our character.

Now when, in obedience to this holy teaching, we spend our thirty, fifty, seventy years in learning to love, will God destroy all this affection, undo all this beautiful work, in death? Is heaven so different from earth--that what grace teaches us here is the one essential of a beautiful life--shall have no place in the heavenly life? Is love only a sentiment of earth, unworthy of heaven? No, no! Love is immortal. Paul says, "Love never fails!" The love that is wrought into our character is imperishable. When we have formed a true friendship with another, heart and heart knitting together--the bond is indissoluble. The external and earthly form of marriage does not last over into the heavenly life--but the real marriage does last; the love which binds the two lives together in one, death cannot touch. Kinship of blood will not have any place in heaven--but the ties that really bind kindred together, brothers and sisters, parents and children--will continue, tender and strong, in the new life.

The friendships there, will not be the continuation of the mere formal attachments of earth, too many of which are empty of love. People will not be close friends in heaven, because they happened to be husband and wife, brother and sister here--but because here they have truly loved each other. If a man

and a woman live in the same house and eat at the same table for forty years, and yet do not really love each other, their lives never truly blending, there is no reason for believing that they will be special friends in heaven. They never were such here. Marriage ties as such, will be dissolved at the grave's edge.

It is very clear, then, that nothing but true union of hearts will survive death. Passion dies at the grave; all sin goes down into the dust and perishes. Selfishness is mortal and undivine. But love that is pure, unselfish, unselfish, free from passion and earthliness the love that springs out of the heart's depths and twines in tenderness about another life that shall last forever. Jonathan's and David's friendship is going on yet in heaven; so is Ruth's and Naomi's; so is Paul's and Timothy's.

If, therefore, we would have our earthly friendships last over--we must be truly 'one in Christ' in our life here. None who are unsaved can enter heaven. All that would separate must be put away. The two lives must blend in tender, thoughtful, self-forgetful love. The same is true of all home-ties and of all friendships. The love must be real. Hearts must be knit together.

It is worth while, therefore, to cultivate our friendships, and to seek to make them abiding and true. Perhaps we are too careless in this. We do not prize highly enough, the love and trust of others. We make too little of hurting other hearts. Ofttimes there is a sundering of friends here--which is sadder than death's sundering. We listen to the talebearer's venomous word, and henceforth we grow distant from our friend. There are friends lost who are living yet, whom we see every day, perhaps--but who are lost to us. They and we have drifted apart. The old tenderness is a buried thing. There are husbands and wives, walking together, dwelling under the same roof, maintaining formal relations of intimacy--and yet a thousand miles apart!

This ought not so to be! We ought never to drift apart when once our hearts are drawn together. Friendship needs cultivation. It requires great patience, self-denial, thoughtfulness, sympathy, affection--to be a friend. But it is worth while. We should cherish our friends. We should make our friendships like Christ's, and He loves unto the uttermost! We should build for eternity! We should weave webs of friendship here--which shall remain beautiful and radiant in the heavenly life.

Does not this hope make it worth while to guard our friendships here? Shall we not learn to be better, truer friends--more patient, more constant, more thoughtful, more faithful? Shall we not seek to have Christ as the bond of union in every friendship? No friendship is sure and complete, and no friendship can go on in heaven, without this golden thread as one of its cords!

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