

The Blood Covenant

by James H. McConkey



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"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (John 15:13-15).

"And [Abraham] was called the Friend of God" (James 2:23).

In the days of Abraham, the relation of friendship was entered into by a rite which was peculiar and significant. Two men, desiring to come into the place of friendship with each other, constituted that friendship by this rite, which was known as "The Blood-Covenant". The parties came together with a common cup. Each man pricked his arm with a sharp instrument, and allowed a few drops of blood to flow into the cup. Sometimes this commingled blood was also mixed with water. Then each man drank from the cup which contained the blood of each. When they had so drunk, they were constituted friends by this custom of their tribe. From this rite of friendship sprang some beautiful and interesting truths we desire to bring before you at this time in our study of the Word of God. The first one is this:

**Each man LAID DOWN HIS OWN LIFE
for the other.**

As he cut the arm and allowed the blood to trickle into the cup, he allowed his own life to flow forth. The "blood is the life". And each man, in type, by that rite laid down his own life on behalf of the other. Now, Abraham "was called the friend of God". And we are told in one place that, in entering into covenant relation with God, Abraham "cut" a covenant with God, as though in relation to this interesting rite among the tribes. Abraham was then called "The Friend of God".

The time came when God called upon Abraham to stand the supreme test of friendship:—to pour out his own life, if need be, for his blood-covenant Friend, the God of Heaven. "Abraham, take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him for a burnt-offering." That was the supreme test. Abraham was to give up his own life—yea, more than his own life—for doubtless he would far rather have laid down his own life than the life of Isaac. You know the story. You recall the picture of the father, with breaking heart, and the bright-faced lad, going up the mountain path together;—the angel of God staying the hand of the father, and the marvelous grace and compassion of God which spared Abraham's only son. But the time came when Abraham's seed needed some one to die for them; to show His love for them even unto death. And though He spared Abraham's

son, yet "God spared not His own Son, but freely gave him up for us all." Ah! how Jesus Christ, our blood-covenant Friend, kept that blood-covenant for you and me! How He poured out His life in suffering, even unto death! They arraigned Him; they tried Him; they bore false witness against Him; they smote Him in the face; they scourged Him; they spat upon Him; they jeered at Him; they wagged their heads at Him; they railed at Him;—but nothing could shake His purpose to pour out His own life for us, His blood-covenant friends. We sing, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." And who can doubt it? No friend—no one bound to us by the tenderest and most sacred ties of this world's relationships, has ever stood the test of friendship as Jesus Christ did in the laying down of His life for us.

But, dear friends, can we take the other side of the truth and say, "Has Jesus Christ a friend in me? Have I laid down my life at His feet?" Turn sometime to 2 Corinthians 5:15, and there note the threefold purpose of His death. "He died for all, and that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them." "*He died*"—for us. "*He died*" *that we might live.* "*He died*" that we who live—*should no longer live unto ourselves.* Ah! we have met the purpose of Christ's death for us as sinners. We have accepted it. We have believed and have been brought from eternal death to eternal life. But is it possible that any of us are baffling the third great purpose of Jesus

Christ's death—the purpose that the believer, who has been delivered from the guilt of sin, and unto eternal life, should give his life to the blood-covenanted Friend!

Do I love the Lord Jesus Christ? That is a real personal question. How may I know that I love Him? "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man *lay down his life* for his friends." Ah! I may speak with the tongue of men and of angels, and yet I may not love my Lord. I may have all wisdom and all knowledge, and have the faith that moves mountains, and yet I may not love my Lord. I may give my body to be burned, and yet I may not love my Lord supremely. But there is one thing He says I may do which is the supreme test of love to Him:—"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life" for Jesus Christ. We cannot lay it down in atonement as He did. But we can lay it down as a blessed, precious living sacrifice at His feet, and thus be His friend. Again:—

Each man RECEIVED THE LIFE of the other.

When each man took that cup, and drank of the blood his friend had allowed to drip into it, he received the life of his friend in type. For the blood is the life. And as he drank the blood he drank the life. "This cup is the new covenant in My Blood: drink ye all of it." I wonder if His mind did not go back to that beautiful picture of hundreds of years before, and if He did not mean to make use of that to make so vivid the great truth that He had poured out His Blood in

that cup for them to drink, in type. I say, each man received the life of the other. "Oh! but," you say, "how could this be true of Jesus, our blood-covenant Friend?" Listen:—"He took not on Him *the nature of angels*, but *the seed of Abraham*," His blood-covenant friend. He took our human nature, did He not? He might have been a mighty angel. He might have gone back and forth between Heaven and earth, making occasional visits to this sin-stained, dying world, in all the radiance of His angelic presence. But, oh! there was more in His Divine heart of love than that for us. He took not the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham. He became *a man* that he might suffer with us;—that He might be "a High Priest that could be touched with the feeling of our infirmities;" that He might be "tempted even as we are, yet apart from sin;" that He might enter into every condition of our human life;—that He might be a God who would actually partake of our human nature and drink of our own human cup of sorrows, trial, testing, weariness, and weeping.

Yet He did even more than that. *Not only did He take our life, as it were, but we have received His life!* He took our human nature up to God; He brought God's Divine nature down to us. He, who was the Son of God, became a man. We, who are men, become by faith in Him, the sons of God. How wonderful is this truth! And how God seems to want to emphasize this, next to the Atonement of Jesus Christ for sins:—*that the life of Christ comes into you and into me as we*

believe in Jesus Christ. Turn to Hebrews, chapter 6, verses 13-17: "For when God made promise to Abraham, since He could swear by none greater, He *swore* by Himself, saying, Surely blessing, I will bless thee, and multiplying, I will multiply thee. And thus, having patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men swear by the greater; and in every dispute of theirs, the oath is final for confirmation. Wherein God, being minded to show more abundantly unto the heirs of the promise the immutability of His counsel, interposed with an oath."

What wonderful thing is this that God condescends to swear shall be given to the heirs of promise? God comes down to the sanction which men themselves use, and swears that *the blessings of Abraham*, His blood-covenant friend, shall come upon the heirs of promise. "Well," we say, "but that must be some Jewish promise; something for the natural seed of Abraham." But now turn to Galatians (3:14), and see how wondrously God Himself puts His finger upon this promise, that we might never err or mistake its nature. He swears that the blessing of Abraham shall come upon the heirs of the promise.

And who are these heirs? and what is this promise? Let us read—"That upon *the Gentiles* might come *the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus*; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

The promise of the Spirit:—that was the blessing, that which was to come on the

Gentiles; the Spirit of God; the very life of God which was to be received through Jesus Christ when men believed in Him. The instant the Gospel is preached at the formation of the young church, and men begin to cry out—"Men and brethren, what shall we do?" the answer comes as we have it in Acts 2:38. What God swore to happens. "Repent and be baptized into the Lord Jesus Christ and ye shall receive *the Holy Ghost*." How plain!—that the instant we believe in Him, the very life of God Himself comes into you and me! I have no theory concerning the Holy Spirit. I have no controversy with you concerning His indwelling. But I do say that God swears that every child of His that believes in the Lord Jesus Christ shall receive the Spirit of God. Can we ever doubt that to which God has sworn? If we are His children, let us believe that the life of God has really come into us as the flesh and blood life of our father and mother, which runs in our veins. He Himself says, "This cup is the *new covenant in My Blood*"—the covenant of grace—the promise of the Spirit—the promise of the life of God in us, to enable us to keep and do the will of God as we never could under the law. When we drink that cup, then let us remember that as surely as the glow, the warmth, and the life of that wine is present in our bodies, so surely is the spiritual life of Jesus Christ dwelling with us. God, with the whole universe from which to choose a dwelling-place for Himself and for His life, chose your body and mine! We have received the life of

Christ. Again:—

**Each man was FILLED WITH LOVE
for the other.**

When these friends drank of that blood of the covenant, their hearts clave one to another, as did the hearts of Jonathan and David; and from that time they loved one another as none others loved in all that tribe. And as we think of our blood-covenant Friend, what a Lover of our souls was He! How *tender* was His love. We see Him giving His mother into the hands of the beloved disciple, in the hour of His keenest agony. How *thoughtful* was His love! We see Him providing for the hungry and fainting thousands by preparing the great dinner to meet their needs. By the sea-shore in the morning twilight, as the wearied Apostles come from their night's toiling—we see Him making ready the breakfast for them:—Jesus Christ, the Lord of the universe, making breakfast for His own! We see *the compassion* of His love as it went out to the waifs and strays, the sin-stained and suffering. We see *the unchangableness* of His love, as we are told that He loved His own “even unto the end”:—unto the end of their coldness;—unto the end of betrayal of Him;—unto the end of denial of Him;—unto the end of all His own agony He loved His own. We see this wondrous love of Jesus Christ, and we too long to possess it.

What is the secret of love in our hearts? Listen:—*each man received the life of the other.*

Come out with me into the orchard where the fruit-trees are. Do you see the patient husbandman at work? He is cultivating the trees; he is fertilizing them; he is pruning out the dead wood and superfluous branches. You stand there watching him a while, and then you say, "But, my friend, what about the fruit? I do not see any signs of fruit." And he looks up with a knowing smile—does this wise husbandman—and says, "I am fertilizing for life; I am tilling for life; I am pruning for life; I am cleansing for life. My friend," and he smiles again, "when this tree is filled with *life*, I will not have any concern about fruit." Assuredly, *the secret of fullness of love is simply the secret of fullness of life—the life of His Spirit dwelling in us. It is life that brings love—"The fruit of the Spirit is love."* Our dead, carnal natures do not love as God loves. They love the world; they love the ambitions of the world; they love the praises, the baubles, and gewgaws of the world—your carnal heart and mind. But the God-life, the Christ-life in us, that is love—love of others; that is the love we desire to have; and that is the fruit of the Spirit. Wherefore believe in the Spirit's indwelling; yield to the Spirit; trust in the Spirit; do all that will give the Spirit His way in your life. And as the power and fullness of the Spirit grow in your life, love will grow.

It is the fruit of *the Spirit*, we have said. But do not forget that it is a *fruit*. That means, give it time. It takes time for the bud to swell; it takes time for the blossom to open; it takes time for

the tiny fruit to form; it takes time for it to round out and develop; it takes time for it to mature, until the beautiful blush is on it, and you break it open and have the peach in all its ripeness and lusciousness. *It takes time.* Be patient with yourself as you wait, and trust, and come to know more and more of the Spirit of God. Then some day you will wake up to realize that there is stealing into your heart a glow of love for the lost, and love for others, and love for the fallen, and love for Christ such as you never knew before. God's secret of love is simply His secret *of life*—the Christ life—the Spirit of God within us.

Each friend DID THE WILL of the other.

"Ye are My friends *if ye do whatsoever I command you.*" Each friend stood ready to do that which pleased the other friend. Well, can this be true of God, that He does our will? Listen:—"If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask *what ye will* and *it shall be done unto you.*" Behold the marvel and the blessing of the prayer life! God's wonderful fact that, for the man or the woman who is *abiding in Him*, He stands ready to do *their will*, through prayer. Why should it not be so? When we ask God to do anything according to His will, why should He not do it? God is just as pleased to do that part of His will for which *you* ask, as any other part of His will in the universe. It is for the honor, and glory, and interest of God to do *your* will, when you are

asking according to *His* will. Out there on those great wheat farms in the western prairies is not the owner ready to do the superintendent's will as well as the superintendent to do the owner's will? If the harvesting machine gets out of order, and the superintendent asks for its repair, it is to the interest of the owner to repair it. If the grain is mildewed and spoiling, and the superintendent asks for hands to harvest it, it is to the interest of the owner to answer his request. So when we live in His will, and are striving to do His will, it is to the interest of God's own Kingdom that that will be done; and it pleases God to do it. God is just waiting for us to choose His will. And when we choose to do His will, and ask for anything according to it, He will do it. I tell you, the greatest thought about prayer is not that we are praying to God to do something for us, but that we are praying to God *to carry out His will* in this world of His. And when we pray that, God stands ready to carry it out. "Ye shall ask *what ye will* and it shall be done." When we say, "Lord, I *will* to separate myself from sin; I *will* to come out from the emptiness and foolishness of the world; I *will* to walk closer with Thee; I *will* to know more of Thy power through communion with Thee, through Thy Word, through separation and service;" when we choose these things which are within the will of God, He is ready to do our will, because He is simply doing His own will in us.

Finally, are we not the friends of Jesus in this sense, *that we do His will*? May we speak of this

as the final test as He gives it here, "Ye are My friends *if ye do whatsoever I command you.*" That is the supreme test, dear friends;—not how I feel, but *what I am doing.* And Christ says, that if you and I do His will, this is the test of friendship with Him. And what is it to do His will? What is obedience? It is *an act,* and it is *a life.* *The act* is the surrender to do His will all through our life. Have we done that? *The life* is to carry out the act in every detail of life and to shape and fashion that life not according to our own will but according to the will of God. And if you and I take that step and become His blood-covenant friends, then this Book of His becomes the revelation of His will to us; becomes the test and guide of our life. If we are living to do His will then it matters not what the opinions of others may be. We are to ask ourselves, "What does the Word of my Lord say about this decision, about this step, about this indulgence in my life? Whatever it says, by God's grace, I am going to do." That is what friendship with Jesus means—an act by which we give up our lives to do His will, a life in which day by day we steadily, persistently, with the guidance of this Book, fashion our lives according to the will of God.

And will you notice, as we close, what Christ declares to be the result? The man, the woman, who does His will—what does Christ say about them? You remember His reply, when those in the crowd that stood near to Jesus said to Him: "Master, Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak to Thee," He

stretched forth His hand towards His disciples, and said: "Who is My mother and who are My brethren? Behold My mother, and My brethren: for *whosoever shall do the will of My Father* who is in Heaven, the same is *My brother, and sister, and mother.*" He chose the tenderest, the most beautiful relationships on earth, and said, "The man or the woman who has come into the blood-covenant relationship with Me—who has given up his or her life to do the will of My Father as I am doing it here upon earth—that man, that woman, is closer to Me than My own flesh and blood kindred." Ah, how blessed is the relationship He invites you and me, His children, to enter into with Him! How precious, how dear we are to Him as His *friends!* And thus let us remember that the supreme test of love to our Lord is not our *emotional life*, but simply this: "Ye are My friends *if ye do My will.*" It matters not how prosaic our life is; it matters not how matter-of-fact men and women we are; it matters not that we are not having the wonderful emotional experiences other people may have; it matters not that we are not naturally intense or rapturous, but are quiet, even phlegmatic in our life, characteristics and temperament; if we are daily going about simply doing His will, Jesus Christ says this is the high and supreme test of friendship with Him. Yea, the test of love to Him is to lay down our lives to do His will and then—simply to do it.

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