Best Friends: Self-Sacrifice

Sept. 18th 2022 Scripture Reading: Psalm 40:1-8

SLIDE 1 - TITLE

Throughout this series we have explored what it means for us to be best friends with Jesus. He is not just another addition to our lives or a “like” on our Facebook page. He is our life! Jesus is a demanding best-friend. To help us through this series, we have been using some well-known examples of best friends from books and movies. We considered the friendship of Ferris Bueller and Cameron, of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, Edmond Dantes and his fellow prisoner Abbe Faria, even Batman and Robin. All of these friendships reflect aspects of what it means to be best friends. It makes sense that our fictional friends, created by humans, would touch on truths that we as humans experience in our own friendships. These truths stem from God’s own truth. These truths apply to our own relationship with Jesus. So this week we will be looking at a lot of scripture and jumping around in our bibles, so keep your fingers warmed up and let’s begin with John 15:9-17.

**SLIDE 2-4 – Scripture Reading**

**SLIDE 5 – Capt Kirk and Spock**

So today, as we talk about the idea of self-sacrifice, we are going to look at the relationship between Captain Kirk of the *USS Enterprise* and his second in command, Spock. These famous friends trek through the stars together and encounter new and often dangerous happenings. Spock is a Vulcan and, as such, deals in logic and reason. Emotions don’t factor in for a Vulcan. And I suppose you have heard of the Vulcan death grip, and the famous Vulcan salute, which for the life of me I cannot do. And do you remember what they say? “Live long and prosper.”

There was a Star Trek movie that came out called the “Wrath of Khan” and toward the end there is a scene in which the *Enterprise* is about to be caught in the wake of an exploding planet. They need to engage warp speed in order to survive, but it has been disabled. Spock enters the engine room, restores the warp drive, but is overcome with radiation poisoning in the process. WATCH

**SLIDE 6 – CLIP**

**SLIDE 7 - SPOCK**

Captain Kirk sure gives an award winning “No.” there doesn’t he? He regrets seeing his friend go, but for Spock, his sacrifice was a logical decision. He did not engage in a prolonged internal struggle in order to come to his decision, rather he did the math. The death of one Vulcan is better than the destruction of the whole ship. That was his logic. I don’t know if you realize that these were the exact words spoken by Caiaphas the high priest who more or less led the plot to kill Jesus. Turn back a few pages to John chapter 11. Verse 47-53 READ.

**SLIDE 9-10 - Scripture**

One man, Jesus, dies for the nation, but John adds, not only the nation, but for all of God’s children scattered everywhere. See Caiaphas does not realize what he is saying here. He does not want anyone following after Jesus, he does not want Rome to stomp out the Jewish temple, he wants one man, Jesus to be stopped so that the Jews can go on living as they have been. So while Caiaphas goes on and on about national and political concerns, the Holy Spirit speaks through him theological and eternal truth! One man, Jesus, does in fact die on behalf of all God’s children. Caiaphas, the high priest at the time, has a vision that is so small. He only concerns himself with what he can see in front of him…the temple, the Jewish people, the Roman forces, a disrupter to the system named Jesus, and potential political upheaval. God’s plan on the other hand is eternal, all encompassing and involves what cannot be seen. For Caiaphas victory involved maintaining what already was, for our best friend, Jesus victory involved the defeat of death itself and the uniting of all believers both around the world and throughout all of history. This is called the New Covenant.

Turn to Hebrews 10. Hebrews contains our clearest teaching on the new covenant because it was written to people who were Jewish-Christians. They were seeped in the old way of doing things but have come to faith in the saving work of Jesus. There is a lot there that needs to be worked out and thought through. Hebrews helps clarify and chapter 10 is a crucial part of the explanation.

**SLIDE 11 - HEBREWS**

Verse 10 says, “The Law is a shadow of the good things that are coming, not the real things themselves.” The Law here refers to the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. There is a lot of narrative and important stories contained in those books, but, there are parts that are flat out just rules. All kinds of rules. Some pertain to civil issues; like what to do when you find mold in your house or an infection on your skin. Some are moral, which are summed up in the ten commandments. These laws are universal and apply to everyone for all time. Some laws are ceremonial. These explain how humans are to worship God: How can be a priest, what the priests need to wear, how people can remain ritually clean before God, and many, many details about how to offer sacrifices. But these modes of worship, Hebrews tells us, are but a shadow. They are not the real thing. He goes on, “It (the Law) never can perfect the ones who are trying to draw near to God, through the same sacrifices that are offered continually every year. Otherwise, wouldn’t they have stopped being offered?” All this effort, all the rules of worship, they could never be enough to cleanse us or perfect us. If we want to draw to God, sacrifices are not going to cut it. Verse 4 says, “It’s impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” Well then “What is the point?”, You may well ask. Why would God have his people engage in such worthless practices and follow such useless rules? Well, the answer is, the rules of the sacrificial system are not useless. True, they are not able to accomplish the forgiveness of sins, but they are far from worthless. See verse 1 again…they are a shadow, a hint, a taste of what is to come. Through the work of the Law, we have been prepared for the real thing, the actual cleansing, the true sacrifice: Jesus.

**SLIDE 12 – Baby Food**

It is a little bit like baby food. Eating a jar of baby food sounds terrible. It would never be able to satisfy our cravings, it is not pleasant and we would be bound partake in whatever contained in that jar. But it only sounds terrible because we know that real thing. We understand what it is to have a table spread with culinary options. We know how important texture and flavor and smell are to an appetite. We have the freedom to cook our food in various ways and come up with unending combinations of ingredients. And we don’t eat from confined jars, rather we display our food on a plate and experience different flavors all in one sitting. A baby does not know what they are missing! But they grow to find out don’t they! The shadow becomes real over the course of time.

God also works over the course of time. And now we get to a bible study within a bible study. The author of Hebrews takes us back to Psalm 40 which is a song of king David. Let’s read at verse 6-8. READ

**SLIDE 13 – Psalm**

You don’t relish sacrifices or offerings…just like we do not relish baby food. It is not good enough, it is not desirable. But God gives us ears to hear about the great things, the real things he has in store for us. And David responds. “Here I come! I want to do your will!” Remember David was called a man after God’s own heart. He desired to pursue the real things of God. Well David’s response is Jesus’ response. David was a shadow of Jesus. David was the baby food version of Jesus the real thing, who also says, “Here I come, I want to do your will!”

The author of Hebrews then wraps all of this together. Verse 9, “He puts an end to the first (that is, the Old Covenant, the shadow) to establish the second (the New Covenant, the really real).” And what does it mean for us? Verse 10 is the summery, “We have been made holy by God’s will through the offering of Jesus Christ’s body once for all.” Now he starts talking about preists, which is also addressed in Hebrews 6 and 7. Remember, Caiaphas? He was all about the shadow world, the Old Covenant of ritual and animal sacrifices. But Jesus is the real priest who comes to actually forgive sin and offer eternal life. Hebrew 11-15 READ

**SLIDE 14 - HEBREWS**

Now he jumps us back to Jeremiah. Another bible study! Now before we jump in, we should note a few things about Jeremiah: Very bad things were happening to God’s people during his tenure. Jeremiah was the prophet at large during the fall of Jerusalem. The Babylonians either killed God’s people or exiled them to unknown places. Jeremiah had plenty of bad news to share and many tough words for the people, yet this section that we are about to read, comes from what is known as the Scroll of Hope. Keep hope in mind as we read Jeremiah 31:31-34. READ

**SLIDE 15 -16- Jeremiah**

What was engraved on stone tablets at Mount Sinai, was a shadow of what is to be engraved on our hearts. Relating to God through a ritualized system was a shadow of knowing him intimately. Atoning for sin through the sacrifice of animals was a shadow of God’s forgiveness made available to us through the sacrifice of our best friend Jesus.

Spock sacrificed himself for the sake of his friends. His last words to Kirk were spoken through a blast shield, but maybe we can hear them as a shadow of Jesus’ voice saying, “I have been and always shall be your friend.

**SLIDE 17 - SPOCK**

Live long and prosper.” Amen.