

TITLE: "A Bicycle Built for Two"

TEXT: Philippians 1:21-23 (NT pp. 196-197)

Paul, who is in prison in Rome awaiting execution, writes: "21For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. 22If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. 23I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better..."

Introduction – Life played forwards

Bernie Siegel is a medical doctor who has written a lot about the healing process. In his book *How To Live between Office Visits*, he wrote this, titled "Life Played Backwards":

Life is tough.
 It takes a lot of your time,
 All your weekends,
 And what do you get at the end of it?
 ...Death, a great reward.
 I think that the life cycle is all backwards.
 You should die first, get it out of the way.
 Then you live twenty years in an old age home.
 You get kicked out when you're too young,
 You get a gold watch, you go to work.
 You work forty years until you're young
 Enough to enjoy your retirement.
 You go to college,
 You party until you're ready for high school,
 You become a little kid, you play,
 You have no responsibilities,
 You become a little boy or girl,
 You go back into the womb,
 You spend your last nine months floating.
 You finish off as a gleam in someone's eye.

Bernie feels that death is a terrible reward. However, if Jesus is your Friend, death IS a GREAT reward. One of the blessings of friendship with Jesus is that you know, you KNOW, that you will be with Jesus forever and ever and that forever will be wonderful.

And you also know that those loved ones who have died are with Jesus and you know, you KNOW, that you will see them again.

1. What IS a friend?

The basic premise of the sermon this morning is that Jesus wants to be your friend and that there are many, many blessings in store if you DO become friends with Jesus.

First of all, what IS a friend? ...A friend is someone who, over time, you can trust. How do you know that you can trust someone? ...By how willing they are to make sacrifices for you. I moved 20 or so times by the time I was 25. One of my sayings used to be, "You know who your friends are when it's time to move." I found that friends help you pack and stay in touch once you have moved away.

Here are some other quotes about friends that I have collected over the years:

"You know who your friends are when you need to borrow a car."

"A friend is one you can call at 2:00 a.m."

"You find out who your friends are when you have cancer."

"Only a REAL friendship survives bagpipe lessons."

"You find out who your friends after the divorce."

Friends make sacrifices for you and because of that you know you can trust them through thick and thin.

Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice for you when he suffered and died on the cross. And if you were the only person in the world, Jesus would have died just for you. You can TRUST Jesus. In fact, if you become friends with Jesus, you can trust that in every second of your life, in your moment of death and in your life after death, Jesus will NEVER leave you or forsake you even for a second.

2. How do you make friends with Jesus?

So, What's it like to develop a deep friendship with Jesus? ...Let me tell you a story. This is by the Rev. Dr. William T. McConnell (*The Pastor's Story File* 10/91 "Trust"):

At first, I saw God as my observer, my judge, keeping track of the things I did wrong, so as to know whether I merited heaven or hell when I died. He was out there sort of like the president. I recognized his picture when I saw it, but I really didn't know him.

But later on when I met Jesus, it seemed as though life was rather like a bike ride, but it was a tandem bike, and I noticed that Jesus was in the back helping me pedal.

I don't know just when it was that Jesus suggested we change places, but life has not been the same since.

When I had control, I knew the way. It was rather boring, but predictable... It was the shortest distance between two points. But when Jesus took the lead, He knew delightful long cuts, up mountains, and through rocky places at breakneck speeds. It was all I could do to hang on! Even though it looked like madness, Jesus said, "Pedal!"

I worried and became anxious and asked, "Where are you taking me?" He laughed and didn't answer, and I started to learn to trust.

I forgot my boring life and entered into the adventure. And when I'd say, "I'm scared," Jesus would lean back and touch my hand.

I did not trust Jesus to control my life at first. I thought He'd wreck it. But Jesus knows bike secrets, know how to make it bend to take sharp corners, knows how to jump to clear high rocks, knows how to fly to shorten scary passages.

And I'm learning to shut up... and pedal in the strangest places, and I'm beginning to enjoy the view and the cool breeze on my face and appreciate my delightful constant companion, Jesus Christ. And when I'm sure I can't do anymore, Jesus just smiles and says... "Pedal."

So how DO you make friends with Jesus?

Spend time with Jesus in prayer. Tell Jesus your concerns and problems, but also ask the Lord for guidance. Then DO what the Lord asks to do each day. You will mistake your own will for God's will, but eventually you will be able to discern the difference between God's will and your own. When you do God's will, God will bless you, and there is nothing, NOTHING, better than the Lord's blessings.

3. The Lord's blessings

What ARE some of the Lord's blessings?

You will know that you will be with Jesus forever and ever and that forever will be wonderful. You will have the assurance that those loved ones who have died are with Jesus and you know, you KNOW, that you will see them again.

Let me tell you a story (Brenda Carpenter 11-6-06 filed under "Funerals").

She jumped up as soon as she saw the surgeon come out of the operating room. She said: "How is my little boy? Is he going to be all right? When can I see him?"

The surgeon said, "I'm sorry. We did all we could, but your boy didn't make it."

Sally said, "Why do little children get cancer? Doesn't God care any more? Where were you, God, when my son needed you?"

Sally walked out of Children's Mercy Hospital for the last time, after spending most of the last six months there. She put the bag with Jimmy's belongings on the seat beside her in the car.

The drive home was difficult. It was even harder to enter the empty house. She carried Jimmy's belongings to her son's room. She started placing the model cars and other personal things back in his room exactly where he had always kept them. She lay down across his bed and, hugging his pillow, cried herself to sleep.

It was around midnight when Sally awoke. Lying beside her on the bed was a folded letter. The letter said:

"Dear Mom, I know you're going to miss me; but don't think that I will ever forget you, or stop loving you, just 'cause I'm not around to say "I Love You". I will always love you, Mom, even more with each day. Someday we will see each other again.

Don't be sad thinking about me. This really is a neat place. Grandma and Grandpa met me as soon as I got here and showed me around some, but it will take a long time to see everything. The angels are so cool. I love to watch them fly. And, you know what? Jesus doesn't look like any of his pictures. Yet, when I saw Him, I knew it was Him.

Jesus himself took me to see GOD! And guess what, Mom? I got to sit on God's knee and talk to Him, like I was somebody important. That's when I told Him that I wanted to write you a letter, to tell you good bye and everything. But I already knew that wasn't allowed.

Well, you know what Mom? God handed me some paper and His own personal pen to write you this letter. I think Gabriel is the name of the angel who is going to drop this letter off to you. God said for me to give you the answer to one of the questions you asked Him: 'Where was He when I needed him?' "God said He was in the same place, with me, just as he was when His son Jesus was on the cross. He was right there, as He always is with all His children.

Oh, by the way, Mom, no one else can see what I've written except you. To everyone else this is just a blank piece of paper. Isn't that cool? I have to give God His pen back now. He needs it to write some more names in the Book of Life. Tonight I get to sit at the table with Jesus for supper. I'm sure the food will be great.

Oh, I almost forgot to tell you. I don't hurt anymore. The cancer is all gone. I'm glad because I couldn't stand that pain anymore and God couldn't stand to see

me hurt so much, either. That's when He sent The Angel of Mercy to come get me. The Angel said I was a Special Delivery! How about that?

Signed with Love from God, Jesus & Me.

Conclusion – Just pedal

If you make friends with Jesus, you may not actually get a letter from God, but you will certainly get the same assurance; the assurance that you will be with Jesus forever and ever and that forever will be wonderful and the assurance that loved ones who have died are with Jesus and that you will see them again.

And all YOU have to do in the meantime, is let Jesus drive ...and just pedal.