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Market Street Fellowship

True Fellowship

I'm not exactly sure why, but every year around the holidays I often come back here after traveling and unload a bunch of my thoughts and inward disturbances on all of you. I see things in myself and in the church that I find unsettling – much of which has to do with the soul's connection to the old creation. I'm seeing it even more clearly now and I wanted to share some of my thoughts this morning.

I was reading through my notes this morning and thinking that you'll have to forgive the frankness with which I speak today. Usually I'm up here, I suppose like a teacher or pastor, attempting to describe and proclaim the reality of something I've seen in Christ. Sometimes, however, I'm up here more like a friend or brother trying to process and react to things that are simply blowing my mind. I'm growing up in Christ right along with all of you. We're all growing up together. I struggle sometimes in knowing how much to say. I don't want to water anything down. On the other hand I don't want to speak beyond what is appropriate.

Anyway, I have a lot of thoughts floating through my head with regard to fellowship and the spending of time. A lot of thoughts with regards to sentiment and emotions. If what I share this morning sounds like the ravings of a lunatic then just let it go for now. Maybe this isn't the time for you to hear it. I realize that it is easy to offend with things like this...which isn't always a bad thing. With things that are dearest to the human heart, it's generally better to let the Spirit of God do the surgery than to have a person attempt to rip things away from people.

So, if I offend you this morning, I certainly don't mean to. I just feel impressed to say a few things plainly. And it has to do with noticing, even more than I have before, that apart from truly sharing the eternal and spiritual reality of Christ one with another, people really don't have anything very significant to share. Now if a person hasn't experienced or at least tasted the reality of life and the view and knowing of that life that can be shared by the body of Christ, well, then there is nothing to compare to. But if you have experienced something of the sharing of Christ in His body, then I expect you'll hear what I'm trying to say.

Everything that we come to know of Him is actually possessed by us, can be shared one with another, and is eternally real. Everything that we know or experience of the earth or of the human soul is not really possessed by us, cannot truly be shared, and is only temporarily and limitedly real.

Maybe the Lord hasn't dealt with your heart along these lines yet. But I have continued to notice in a sort of uncomfortable and disturbing sort of way, that apart from eternal reality as it is in Christ, people don't really share anything. Jessie and I were talking about this on our drive home the other night. What do we share apart from Him? What do you really share apart from the eternal reality and Person that He is. A memory? An activity? A laugh? Some time in the same house? Kids? Ok.

Granted. You share these things in the flesh. Hollywood exalts these things as the things that make life real and give it worth. But what have you **really** shared?

Ok, so you had a get-together and caught up with cousin Bill. What does catching up mean? Well, we shared a few memories and now I know where his new job is. And boy he's funny. Ok. Alright. But I couldn't seem to help being disturbed in my conversation with cousin Bill that there was nothing of life or substance or permanence in what we were sharing, nothing that hadn't already passed away (and existed only in memory) or wasn't about to pass away with the ticking of a clock. For a brief moment his soul humored mine. For a brief moment my memory refreshed his about something that happened years ago. But there was simply nothing spiritual or real or anything of eternal weight or value or purpose in any of that. It was either passing or it had already passed. And all we could do was talk about it, remember it, or laugh about it.

And I noticed that we seem to rank these sorts of experiences with some sort of a "grade" – good time, bad time, etc – based on how it temporarily effects an emotion. An emotion that is as fleeting as the experience that effects that emotion. An emotion that may not have anything to do with reality. Somehow, emotions become the definition of truth and reality, rather than reality becoming the definition of emotion.

And we rate and assess our life and experiences and relationships by the effect that these things have on our emotional barometer. Again, emotion defining purpose. Emotion defining reality. Constantly changing emotion as the foundation for a constantly changing reality. Take a picture when its good, because its sure about to change.

Can you see what I'm trying to convey. Hey that was a great time yesterday. What was great about it? Oh, that last touch down, it made me feel happy. Do you still feel happy? No, that was yesterdays game. So happiness is gone? Well, I still have a memory of it, and then there's tomorrow's game.

You know I'm certainly not against sports. I could have said that same dialogue regarding just about anything. Its just that somehow you begin to wake up and realize that what we call life is rushing past us and the best you can do is hope that it effects you in a pleasant way on its way by. And much of our prayer life is a petitioning of God to help it be more pleasant.

And all of this has just been appearing to me to be so unreal, so unstable, so wrong. I hope you can hear what I'm saying. I'm not speaking against any THING. I'm saying that all things lack purpose and reality and substance and truth apart from Him.

Its difficult to describe. And I realize it doesn't do a whole lot of good for holiday cheer. But I couldn't help but notice that everything that I was sharing with those around me in the flesh, was not only just flesh, but something I couldn't ever really possess. Its not the same yesterday, today, and forever. Its always passing by me. It's a vacation that's now over. It's a hug that I try to remember. It's a laugh or a movie that touched my emotion. These are the so-called "good things" of life. And yet, I could see that I didn't really possess any of them. That came into an uncomfortable clarity and focus. They were just natural things whizzing by my experiential radar. Laugh at that as it goes by. Cry about that as it rushes by. Take

a picture of that quickly, because there it goes. I couldn't keep any of it except in this sentimental, nostalgic, cesspool of confused emotion and memory and unfulfilled longing.

You'll forgive my frankness. But I watch the compass of my heart point towards anything and everything that seems to give the promise of a real bearing. A north star. A bearing that is an anchor. A bearing that is a foundation and a reality. And year by year I never find it in the old creation. In the natural creation. And year by year I continue to mostly look for it there.

And I'm certainly not saying that I don't love the people I only know in the flesh. I do love them. That's part of the sting of it. That's at the heart of my struggle. I want to share more with them than just an emotion or a memory or one more movie. I want to share something with them that is real and is true and is eternal. **I do love them. That's exactly why it seems so tragic to share time without sharing life. To share memories without sharing truth. To share flesh without sharing spirit.**

You'll have to excuse my sobriety on this issue. It's just that I can't help but notice that in the best of the shadow there still is no substance. A perfect shadow of a loaf of bread still won't fill your stomach. A perfect shadow of true relationship still won't be the sharing of life. Why do we search for the living among the dead?

I've had 2nd Corinthians 5:15 floating around in my head for several days.

2Co 5:14 For the love of Christ constrains us, having judged this, that if One died for all, then all died; 15 and He died for all, that the living ones may live no more to themselves, but to the *One* having died for them and having been raised. 16 So as we now know no one according to flesh, but even if we have known Christ according to flesh, yet now we no longer know *Him so*. 17 So that if anyone *is* in Christ, *he* is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new!

That pretty much perfectly sums up all that I'm saying. That is what I find my soul crying out for. Not to know the verse, but to know the reality described by this verse. To no longer know anyone according to flesh. Not even Christ. But to know all and share with all the eternal, unchanging Life that we have in Him. What I want is real fellowship.

What does it mean to "no longer know anybody according to the flesh". In a word, it means that we no longer relate to one another according to anything that the cross has put away. What has the cross put away? Well, we just spent 8 weeks looking through the Scriptures at the reality of the passing away of the old man, the old creation, and the old covenant.

The point of relating, the reality of connection, what we share, is not the old things that have passed away, but the new things that have come. The point of contact, the reality of relationship has now to do with everything new, and spiritual, and eternal that we share of Him, in Him. No longer is our relationship with one another supposed to deal with natural things of the old man or the old creation. Not just common past times, common interests, common ideas, common emotional make-up, common locality, common sense of humor. No, these are things that have passed away.

And I don't mean that they have ceased to exist in the earth, but they have ceased to have relevance in the heavens. And the heavens is where you live and move and have your being in Christ. They've ceased to have relevance in Christ. Why? Because in Christ the old has passed away and behold all things are new.

I'm not talking about the removing of your personality or individuality. I'm talking about your personality and individuality being defined, identified, constrained, changed, shaped, conformed, to and by that which is Life indeed.

Not trying to find something natural that we have in common and sharing it for an hour. Rather finding, discovering all things spiritual and eternal that we have in common and sharing it in every hour. Not trying to find a friend whose emotions feel like my own, but sharing the Truth of Christ as the stability, certainty, and reality of all emotions with every man and woman who sees Him. Can you hear the difference?

I would rather share a tiny view of Christ with you in spirit and truth, than have all things in common in the earth or in the flesh. I mean that.

The disciples of Jesus come up to him one day and say "Rabbi, your mother and brothers are here to see you". Jesus says "who are my mother and brothers but these". There is a kindred that is much deeper than blood. There is a kindred that blood only testified to. In the first creation, the life was in the blood. That was spoken over and over in the Old Testament. "The life is in the blood." Now what we share is greater than natural blood. It is, in fact, what all blood relationship testified to. Not blood flowing through veins, but an altogether different life flowing in and through a soul. Not sharing DNA and blood type and genes, but sharing life, and resurrection, and death to sin, and righteousness, and wisdom and redemption, and love, and truth, and faith, and purpose.

You see, as Christians we still try to share things of the flesh. We still think that fellowship is Christians getting together into the same room and sharing the earth, sharing the flesh, sharing the soul. Sharing a hobby. Sharing a cup of coffee. Sharing a movie. I'm not against coffee and hobbies and movies. But fellowship is sharing the one Life that He is. You can do that over coffee. But don't mistake the two.

Fellowship in my body is the reality that each member of my body shares one life. What does my hand have in common with my foot? Life. My hand has fellowship with my foot. How? Because one life causes them to have all things in common. My eye has fellowship with my ear. How? Because one life is the substance and reality or their relating one with another.

If you cut off my foot and my hand and put them in the same bucket, that would not be fellowship. Why? Because proximity isn't fellowship. Sharing life is fellowship. If you cut off my ear and my eye and painted both blue, they would not have fellowship. Why? Because being the same color isn't fellowship. Sharing life is fellowship. If you could somehow cut off both my hands and teach them how to do the same things, you would not have fellowship. Why? Because common activity or interest is not fellowship. Jason, what is fellowship? Fellowship is the sharing of one life between those who are partakers of that one life.

So now my hand can say to my foot, I no longer know you according to the bucket, even though formerly I knew you that way. Behold the bucket is gone, and all things are new in Jason. My eye can to the ear, I no longer know you according to common color, though that is formerly what we had in common. Behold, for those of us body parts who have been joined to Jason the old has passed away, and He is the newness of all that is come. And now we all relate to one another according to and in and by the one life that we share.

Can you hear what I'm saying? Christianity isn't black and white trying to get along. It's not black and white trying to agree on common doctrines. Lets have a conference where blacks and whites come together and find natural things in common. No...lets not. Lets have all blacks and whites and reds and yellows come to the realization and reality that we are all crucified with Christ and it is no longer black and white that live, but Christ all and in all. Lets have all colors and ages and genders come to the acknowledgement that in Christ there is no black and white, or Jew and Gentile, but only one new man in Him, where Christ is all and in all.

I'm not making a race statement. I'm not making a gender statement. I'm summing up all race and gender into the death of Christ so that we can find that unity and true fellowship have to do with sharing the one resurrected life of Christ. All unity, all fellowship, is His body experiencing and sharing His Life.

Where is the relationship between Jew and Gentile? Where is the relationship between Black and White? Where is the relationship between male and female? Paul will tell you plainly.

Eph 2:13 But now, in Christ Jesus you who then were afar off, came to be near by the blood of Christ. **14** For He Himself is our peace, He making us both one, and breaking down the middle wall of partition, **15** in His flesh causing to cease the enmity, the Law of the commandments in decrees, that He might in Himself create the two into One New Man, making peace, **16** and might reconcile both in one body to God through the cross, slaying the enmity in Himself. **17** And coming, *He* proclaimed "peace to you, the ones afar off, and to the ones near." **18** For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

He caused Jew and Gentile, both at enmity with God and one another because of the Law, to be put to death in His body, creating in the resurrection ONE NEW MAN, thus making peace. "Slaying the enmity **in Himself**". Now proclaiming peace.

Friends, that's not world peace. That's not peace in the Middle East. That's not the peace He brings. His peace is the peace of being one body, sharing one life, being entirely reconciled through His death unto the Father **where Christ is both our relationship with the Father and Christ is also our relationship with one another**. That is peace. That is the peace we are to proclaim. That is how he is the Prince of Peace.

He didn't come to bring peace on planet earth. As far as that is concerned he said very plainly

Mat 10:34 Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth. I did not come to send peace, but a sword. **35** For I have come to set a man against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. **36** And a man's foes *shall be* those of his *own* household.

He brought true peace. He brought peace with God through us sharing His life. Peace through being dead to the old and hidden with Christ in God. That's true peace with God. He brought peace between male and female, Jew and Gentile, Black and White, by bringing all of that into the grave and giving whosoever will come the One Life that He is. Do you see that is why Ephesians 2:14 says "He Himself is our peace". He doesn't wave a magic wand and create world peace. He's not trying to fix the old creation. He is the very reality of peace for all who will know Him in the New Creation.

Unity isn't something we establish, it's not something the world can create, it's something His life is. Fellowship isn't something that we do, it's the sharing of Him. Peace isn't something we make, it's something that we preserve as His body in the true knowing of Him. Paul says "be diligent to **preserve** the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" Ephesians 4:3

He is our peace with God. He is our peace with one another. Formerly, my hand and my foot were at enmity in the bucket, but now one life became their peace. I have been made unto them reconciliation. Formerly, my eye and my ear didn't perceive things the same. Now one life has become their peace, their reconciliation, their common view. One life becomes peace. One life becomes unity. One life becomes fellowship.

Now in Him all that is old is put away and all that is new has become the reality and life and unity and fellowship and relationship. Now it's not Jews and Gentile, Blacks and Whites who believe Christian doctrines trying to find things and places and ideas and DNA that we have in common. Now it is waking up to the reality of a finished work wherein all of that has become irrelevant.

Sure we still have blood, but blood is not the reality of relationship. Sure we still have color, but color is not the place of connection. Sure we still go to the same house, but that is not the true gathering that we know.

Anyway, I'm just trying to help us to see that for us who are in Christ, fellowship is so much more than sharing time, sharing stories, memories, emotions, proximity, activity, color, etc. Fellowship is nothing more than the sharing of Christ. Sharing what we have come to know and see of Him. Sharing the joy and peace that comes in knowing the truth. Sharing the eternal, unchanging reality of new life, and our ever increasing view of it.

Sharing with one another what is real. What will never change. What is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Sharing something that is not defined by emotion, but rather comes to define all emotion. Sharing something that runs deeper than sentiment and deeper than blood. Fellowship is sharing Christ our life.