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Market Street Fellowship

Fellowship pt. 2

Last week I attempted to share something the Lord was showing me having to do with fellowship. After corresponding with a couple people this week, I felt it might be appropriate to spend another week looking at the reality of fellowship – both to take it a little further and to clarify a couple things that may have been misunderstood from last week.

My sermon last week was an attempt to contrast believers sharing Christ (all that is eternally and spiritually real) and believer's only sharing the earth (natural things, passing things, things that are not eternally and spiritually real). What I shared came out of seeing that much to the time when we think of fellowship, we think of Christians getting together and sharing the earth. However, in reality, biblically speaking, fellowship is where believers actually share the LIFE of Christ.

True fellowship is when Christ's body shares Christ's life. And much of my sermon last week had to do with the desire to see Christ's body come to truly experience, share, abide in, fellowship in, that which is spiritual and eternal, rather than having our fellowship be primarily the sharing of the old creation and the things in it.

Its all very fine and nice to agree with a Bible verse that states that the cross has crucified us to the entire first creation, the entire world. Of course we believe that. Paul said it here and there and here. But it's a different thing altogether when the Spirit of God starts putting his finger on exactly what that means...and shows us how we have not allowed Him to work that in our hearts. That is when we often start looking for the exit ramp. I see that so often in myself.

We can come here every week and talk about all that the cross has put away, and yet never allow the work of the cross to have its way in us. In other words, the cross has finished a work of God. It has taken away the first and established the second. We can agree with that theologically, and yet not allow Him to take away the first and establish the second in our very soul.

Well, friends...the cross touches natural relationships. **It touches natural relationships because it touches all things natural. It doesn't destroy them, but it divides them from the spiritual and the eternal. They continue to exist because we have this treasure in earthen vessels. But the cross makes true fellowship not the sharing of the vessel, but the sharing of the contents of the vessel. The sharing of Christ.**

What I was attempting to say last week was that for much of the church, we understand fellowship to be a sharing of the vessel rather than the sharing of the treasure.

Listen. In saying that, I am in no way suggesting that natural fellowship, or earthly relationships are not good or not a gift from God. Or that they shouldn't be

appreciated or enjoyed. I am not saying that or implying that. As far as the earth goes, natural relationships and family are as good and wonderful and enjoyable as it gets. And as long as you are in that earthen vessel, you are going to have natural relationships and be involved in natural things. Of course you are. But what I was saying is that there is far more to fellowship, when it comes to the body of Christ, than the sharing of natural things.

And I mentioned last week that I often see some things about natural verses spiritual relating more clearly over the holidays. But that is certainly not because I despise the earth or hold contempt for natural families or celebrations. I love that stuff. Probably too much. The reason I bring it up around the holidays is only because at holidays I can see much more clearly that I often share so much TIME with people I love without sharing much LIFE. I'll share a story, a meal, a game, a memory....but then its over. And what I long to share with people more and more is something that is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Most of you don't need me to say this, but just for the record... I am exceedingly in love with my natural family and so very grateful to God for it. I enjoy and am excited about my family more now than ever. In fact, seeing the truth as it is in Christ has already, in some very real ways, liberated me to truly love them in a new way. I do not look down on the wonderful blessing that families are, but I realize something about them...something I was trying to share last week.

I realize that there is something far better than simply sharing time and experiences and emotions. There is something far more real and eternal than all of that. There is the sharing of Christ. I'm not talking about sharing Christianity. I'm not talking about sharing similar world views, common doctrines, and beliefs. I'm not talking about sharing Christmas traditions or prayers before meals. I'm not talking about sharing a church service, an advent wreath, or a Bing Crosby album around a Christmas tree. I'm talking about sharing Christ. I'm talking about sharing the reality and experience of His very life, and our ever increasing view of that life. That is better than anything else. And it is eternal.

I never said nor meant to imply that relationships that do not share Christ have no value in the world. The world is exactly where such relationships do have value. But I did say that apart from sharing Christ, one with another, we are not sharing what is spiritual and eternal. We are really sharing things that are passing, or memories of things that have already passed. We share things in the flesh that effect our hearts but don't truly connect our hearts, because the true connection of the human soul is through being baptized into one Spirit. And I long to share more with Christ's body than natural life. I long to share Christ's life with Christ's body.

Somebody asked me this week - "Jason, it sounds like you don't enjoy the life God has given you on planet earth. I'm not sure that you appreciate fully what God has given you.". Oh there is so much I would like to say in response to that.

To begin with, its not that I don't enjoy life on the earth. I can promise you that that is not my problem. My problem is actually that I enjoy it far too much...in the sense that it has way too much of my heart. Jesus says "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also". I find that, far too much of the time, my treasure is in the "good" things of the earth, and so my heart is there also.

I am in no way opposed to the joys of natural life, or the love of natural families, or the excitement of natural games and fun, etc. These things are good and, in a right understanding are wonderful gifts from the Lord. But, you see, my problem isn't that I find no joy in them. My problem isn't that I find no purpose in them, no identity, no reality in them. No. My problem, and I would suspect yours as well, is that most of reality, purpose, identity, and joy ARE in fact, in these things – and these things are neither spiritual or eternal.

Some of you hear me use that word "spiritual" or "eternal" and you think that I mean "having to do with God". Like a church is spiritual and a car is not. That has nothing to do with what I mean. When I say spiritual and eternal, I mean that which is actually, substantially, eternally real. I mean that which is concrete, unceasing, reality – and yet not carnal, material, earthly.

We have been crucified with Christ and are now dead to the entire first creation, to the entire world Paul says in Galatians 6. It is not the realm of true treasure, and yet I find my treasure there. It is not the realm or reality of true connection with souls, and yet most of my connection is there. It is not the realm of true joy, and yet most of my joy is there. It is not the realm of eternal purpose or reality, and yet most of my reality and purpose is found there. No, my friend...its not that I don't appreciate the world. I appreciate it far more than I do the heavens. Its not that I don't appreciate the natural. Unfortunately I appreciate it too much...and my heart is lodged there.

"Jason, I'm not sure that you appreciate what God has given you." Oh that is so true. But not in the way you might think. You see, that is what I'm up here every Sunday trying to say. We all know and love and appreciate what God has given us in the old creation. We all know and love and appreciate what God has given us of the earth, and the relationships in the earth, and the things of the earth. But what about all that God has given us in Christ. So many of us no so little, have seen so little by the Spirit, of what God has given us in Christ that we have no ability to understand and appreciate that at all.

You see, what God has given us in Christ is infinitely greater than anything that He has ever given us in the earth. What God has given us in and as His Son should, in our hearts, turn the entire earth into a realm of shadows. A shadow land where we taste of natural goodness, but come to find true goodness only in Him. A shadow land where good food and drink speaks of Him who is food and drink for the soul. Where good company speaks of a unity and brotherhood of spirit. Where all natural good things speak of Him who is their spiritual and eternal counterpart and fulfillment.

My goodness. Friends do you understand that the very problem that I stand up here and describe week after week is that we have come to appreciate the shadow and have fallen so short of appreciating the substance. We have learned to enjoy, and indulge in, and fellowship in the shadow. But we have no idea what it means to live and abide in and share the life of Jesus Christ.

I'm not talking about the future here. I'm not talking about what things will be like in heaven. Haven't we read time and time again that God has every believer raised up and seated in heaven in Christ, in the Father, right now! Jason, I don't know what that means. I know...I know....that is our problem. How can we appreciate what we haven't seen? How can we appreciate what we haven't allowed the Spirit of

God to show us? How can we appreciate what we do not know? We can't. **And so often we are unwilling to let Him show us the truth and reality of being in Christ in the heavens, and all that that means, because we're too busy "appreciating the earth".**

Brothers and sisters, if you and I want to appreciate what God has given us, we must come to see what God has given us in Christ. Sinners and unbelievers appreciate the earth. The heathen appreciates the earth. Hollywood appreciates and exalts the best of the earth. But you and I have been given something that is not of the earth. You and I have been given something that is what the good of the earth testified to. You and I have been given Christ. Fellowship is the sharing of Christ, and not the sharing of the earth.

Somebody new might say to me – what have we been given in Christ? Well, where do we start? You've been given the very life of God in the soul of man. How's that for starters. You've been given a resurrection out from among the dead. You've been given the very love of God that He has eternally and exclusively had for His Son. You've been given a righteousness that it is the very outworking of His indwelling nature. You've been given a death that you could never die. A death to the old man, the old creation, and an ending of the old covenant. You've been given the Father's House, and I don't mean a building with a big back yard. I mean a place to dwell in the Father Himself. You've been given an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled which is through sharing the life of the Firstborn from among the dead. You've been given a family in the Spirit where you have all things of true life in common. You've been given everything that God is and everything that God has that is eternal and spiritual and will never pass away.

I know I appreciate a hug from my wife. But do I appreciate the resurrection from among the dead? I know I appreciate playing games with my family. But do I appreciate Christ's kingdom and priesthood working in my soul? Or do I even know what such things are? Have I even seen past the shadow? Have I ever looked beyond the veil? Have I ever seen past the earth? Have I, like Nathaniel, seen the heavens open. Have I seen the veil rent and peered into the Holy of Holies where I have died and my life is hidden with Christ in God. Or do such things really ever cross my mind except briefly when somebody's reading a verse at church?

Can you hear what I'm saying, friends? I'm not trying to be heavy. I'm trying to be real. And I'm certainly not trying to diminish all that is good and wonderful about natural families and relationships. I am, however, insisting....**yes, insisting**, that God has given us FAR more than all of that in what He has given us in Son. True spiritual joy. A bad football game can't take it from you. A bad case of cancer can't take it from you. Imprisonment, torture, and de-capitation couldn't take it from Paul.

"I have learned the secret of being content in all circumstances" Paul says. That doesn't mean that He learned to love all natural circumstances. That means that **DESPITE** any natural circumstance – good, bad, and indifferent (and he lists a few) – that his contentment comes from dwelling in and knowing the reality of being in Christ.

Yes, true spiritual joy. True spiritual and eternal relationship. True adoption and fatherhood. True spiritual kindred. The inward struggle and dissatisfaction I was

attempting to describe last week had nothing to do with not appreciating the earth.
My struggle is that I am content with far too little.

We are born into the world and learn to become content with what the world offers, rather than finding the true satisfaction of our soul in the knowing of Christ. We are content to relate to one another in natural and temporary things rather than truly having our relationships exist in spirit and truth. The sharing of spiritual life rather than natural things.

And all that I was trying to share last week is that what we have come to in Christ, and what we are allowed to and invited to share of Christ, is far greater than what we can share of the earth. Natural relationship is good. Spiritual union is infinitely better.

If you'll recall, I mentioned that connection in blood, blood ties, testified to in Old Covenant Israel, a joining, a union, that would be greater than the same blood flowing through veins. We have far more than similar blood and genes in these bodies. We have the very same life. We have the very same Spirit.

Paul says **1Co 12:13** "For also by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free, even all were made to drink into one Spirit."

Eph 4:3 "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. **4** *There is* one body and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling, **5** *one* Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6** *one* God and Father of all, who *is* above all and through all and in you all."

1Co 6:17 But the *one* being joined to the Lord is one spirit.

Our relationship in Him is not supposed to be the sharing of the earth. Sure we have natural bodies. Sure we have to live on planet earth and buy gas for our cars and have natural relationships. There is nothing wrong with that. I'm not saying that it is bad. I'm simply saying that it is of the earth.

But what we have in Him is far greater than human beings relating in and by natural things. If we are Christ's body, then let our relationship be Christ's life. If we are born of Spirit, baptized into Spirit, live by the Spirit, and are to walk in the Spirit – should not our fellowship be the sharing of spirit?

Please consider these verses. I referred to a couple of these last week. But I want to show you that I'm not making this up to ruin your Christmas. I'm not making my own application of the cross to natural family. If anything, I left a few of these verses out last week because I didn't want to say too much. But nevertheless, here they are. These are the verses that we love to ignore when we're in love with the earth. If our treasure is in the earth, then there our heart will be also.

And yet these words were written by people who saw far more than the earth. I won't comment much on them. I'll let the Spirit make application in your heart.

Luk 14:26 If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and his *own* life also, he cannot be My disciple.

Luk 8:20 And it was told to Him *by some*, who said, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside desiring to see You. 21 And He answered and said to them, My mother and My brothers are those who hear the Word of God and do it.

2Co 5:16 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*.

Mat 22:29 Jesus answered, and said to them: Ye do err, from not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. 30 For in the resurrection of the dead, they do not take wives, nor are wives given to husbands

The Corinthian church asks Paul whether it is wise to marry. He says it is fine to marry, but in one sense it is better not to do so. Why?

1Co 7:32 The unmarried one cares for the things of *the* Lord, how to please the Lord; 33 but the *one* marrying cares for the things of the world, how to please the wife. 34 With the woman... The unmarried one cares for the things of *the* Lord, that she be holy in both body and spirit. But the married one cares for the things of the world, how to please the husband.

Luk 18:29 And He said to them, Truly I say to you, There is no one who has left house, or parents, or brothers, or wife, or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, 30 who shall not receive many times more in this time, and in the age that is coming, eternal life.

2Ti 2:4 No one serving as a soldier entangles *himself* with the affairs of *this* life, so that he might please the *one* having enlisted *him*.

Consider these verses on not fixing our heart or finding our treasure in anything of the earth:

Col 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is sitting at *the* right hand of God. 2 Be mindful of things above, not on things on the earth.

2Co 4:18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

And finally – and I will comment on this one:

Phil 3:18 For many are walking, of whom I have told you often and now tell even weeping, who are enemies of the cross of Christ; 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, whose glory is their shame, those who set their mind on earthly things.

You can take this or leave it, it is my opinion on this verse. But I don't believe Paul is talking about unbelievers in this verse. I don't think he's weeping for the multitudes who have no interest in the gospel of Christ. I think he's weeping for

those who are in Christ that set their mind on earthly things and in so doing become enemies of the cross.

I know that it says that "their end is destruction". But I don't believe that is a reference to hell. I do believe in hell, but I believe that here, as well as many other places in the New Testament, this is a reference to the destruction of everything that is not out from the Vine. I believe it is a reference to everything that we offer Him of the flesh not making it through the fire. A reference to the dead branches on His tree that must be cut down and thrown into the fire. Those branches grow from you and I seeking to do and build and live what is NOT the outworking and increase of His life.

1 Corinthians chapter 3 says this very thing with reference to Christians. In three separate analogies all saying the same thing, Paul admonishes that we must be careful that the growth of the plant is the growth that comes from God. That any building on the foundation must be the increase of the living stone. That which fills the temple must be the very glory of God. Or else what? Or else all that you have built and done will be destroyed. Destroyed by fire, it says. Destroyed by the light of the Day, it says – and yet, it goes on to say, you will be saved, but only as one passing through fire.

Do you see, we who are born again can, in this sense, take the path of destruction. Not a path that will destroy our souls. No, the salvation of our soul was settled at new birth. But a path that will destroy what we've added on to His foundation. A path that will offer up to God the fruit of Cain, the fruit of the flesh, the fruit of the earth. We can choose that path, and the end is destruction. I'm not talking about hell. I'm simply talking about the fire that the cross is consuming all that is not the increase of the Seed.

Paul speaks of this reality in Galatians 3

Gal 3:3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in *the* Spirit, do you now perfect *yourself* in the flesh?

Tim spoke of this some months ago when he referenced Jesus' statement about the broad and narrow path. The narrow path being the path of Life, that is **His** life, and your experiencing and expressing of that life. And the broad path being the "path of destruction", that is the path where all that is not His life is destroyed.

You can take that or leave it. I believe it. And so it strikes me with a weighty and surreal sobriety to realize that I can live my life on earth as one who becomes an enemy of the cross. How do you do that, Paul? Well, you simply reject what the cross has put away, and live by and live in what the cross has put away.

What do you mean, Paul? I mean you have an appetite for the earth as your god, you glory in that which to your shame, and you set your mind on earthly things. In other words, you do not see or look for or know or live in or share what the cross has given you. Rather, you see, look for, know, live in, and share only that which is of the earth. Though you are born of His Spirit, the earth remains your god, your appetite, your treasure, and the realm that owns your heart.

I mention all of this, and read all of these Scriptures, not to bring condemnation or self-examination. In Christ there is no condemnation. In Christ not only the things

we do but the one who did them has been judged. I only mention it that we would continue to wake up to what the cross has done. We would not give lip service to the finished work of the cross and yet resist it in our lives.

The cross touches all things natural, including natural fellowship. It doesn't take away or nullify natural relationships. It doesn't make them worthless. The cross isn't really ever going to take away anything from a natural relationship except for your perspective and understanding of it. But the cross is going to offer you something better. Its going to offer you true relating in spirit and truth. Its going to offer you a union of life. Its going to offer you the sharing of Christ, which will make the sharing of the earth pale in comparison. The finished work of the cross offers you a connection, a union, a relating, a joining, a fellowship that is literally a sharing in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is fellowship and relationship in the earth. It is good and enjoyable and necessary as far as the earth goes. But true fellowship is not really the sharing of time, place, and event. It is the sharing, one with another, of that which is eternal, spiritual, incorruptible, substantial. In other words, true fellowship is the body of Christ sharing the very life of Christ.