

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

FELLOWSHIP WITH THE FATHER AND THE SON.

A Sermon

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“And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”—
1 John i. 3.

THE twelve apostles were favoured with the most intimate intercourse with our blessed Lord; but I can hardly say that they entered into fellowship with him during his life on earth. Each of them might have been asked the question that our Saviour put to one of them: “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?” But after Christ had ascended to heaven, and the Spirit of God had rested upon his disciples, and in proportion as the Spirit did rest upon them, all that they had seen, and heard, and handled of their Lord became a means of communion between himself and them. They were then able to realize what a very near, and dear, and deep, and familiar communion had been possible to them through having spent some three years or so with him in public and in private, and having actually seen him, and heard his voice, and felt the touch of his hand.

Now, since their literal hearing, seeing, and touching Christ did not create communion with him apart from the work of the Spirit, we need not so much regret, as we might otherwise have done, that we never saw, or heard, or touched the Saviour, because we also, without seeing, or hearing, or touching him, can believe in him, and rejoice that he said, “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” And, further, as it is through faith, rather than by sight, or hearing, or feeling, that the Spirit of God operates upon us, when we believe the witness of the apostles concerning Christ, the Spirit of God will bless their message to us, and we shall enter into the apostles' fellowship. What the apostles learnt, they learnt in order that they might tell it to others. All that John saw, he was prepared to speak of according to his ability,
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that others might have fellowship with him; and, dear friends, remember that, if you ever learn anything of Christ,—if you have any enjoyment of his presence at any time,—it is not for yourself alone, but for others also to share with you. When fellowship is the sweetest, your desire is the strongest that others may have fellowship with you; and when, truly, your fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, you earnestly wish that the whole Christian brotherhood may share the blessing with you. My great desire, just now, is not so much to preach to you as to lead you, by the Holy Spirit's gracious assistance, into the actual enjoyment of that which the apostles possessed, that, believing, as we do, their testimony, we might thereby enter into their fellowship.

First, I am going to try to answer this question, *What is this fellowship with the Father and with his Son in general?* Secondly, I want to show you how we can enjoy this fellowship in meeting, as we do, to celebrate the sacred supper in memory of our ascended Lord.

I. First, then, WHAT IS THIS FELLOWSHIP WITH THE FATHER, AND WITH HIS SON, WHICH THE APOSTLES ENJOYED, AND WHICH THEY WISHED US TO SHARE WITH THEM?

Let me give you an illustration to show you what fellowship is. Yet, while I use it, I regret that it falls so far short of the truth I wish to illustrate, yet I know not of a better one. Suppose that a great plague raged in London, like that which carried off so many of the population in years gone by; and suppose that there lived, in this city, a father and a son, whose one care was for the healing of others. Suppose you lived in the same house as they lived in, and that you saw the intimate affection existing between them, and that you were in their council-chamber when they consulted together as to what was to be done for the perishing citizens. You marked the resolve of the son to make a sacrifice of himself, from day to day, by going into the homes of those who were smitten with the plague. You observed him as, with his father's smile resting upon him, he went forth to his work. You were privileged to live in the house while the work of rescue was going on, and you saw how the sick ones were being plucked from the grip of the terrible disease, like brands from the burning. You watched the father's love, and the son's self-sacrifice, and you were filled with admiration of them.

Now, that being taken as a supposition, feeble as it is, I want to ground upon that my description of what is meant by fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. You must not, however, confound fatherhood and sonship, as they exist among men, with these relationships as they stand towards God, for it is the eternal Father and the eternal Son with whom we are to be brought into fellowship and the terms that are used in speaking of them are accommodated to our poor understandings; but they are not to be literally construed; and, especially, they are not to be understood in any carnal sense, nor to be applied to the unregenerate.

Well, suppose we are living in such a house as I have tried to describe to you, the first thing necessary for fellowship with such a

father, and such a son, would be *mutual communication*. To live in the house where they were, yet never to speak to them, or to be spoken to by them, would be no sort of fellowship. Merely to know that there were such persons in the house, and to know that they were engaged in such blessed work as that, would not make us partakers with them, and would not give us communion with them. We must speak to them, and they must speak to us; and the speaking, on both sides, must be of a kind, loving sort;—not, on our part, that which would offend them; nor, on their part, that which would imply anger towards us. That is the very beginning of our fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. There must be mutual communication between us. We must have heard the voice of God in our hearts, and we must have spoken to God from our hearts. Thou canst not enjoy this fellowship, my friend, whatever thou sayest, unless thy soul has learnt to speak with God in prayer and praise, and unless thine ear has learnt to listen to whatever he saith unto thee through his Book, and by his Spirit, through his ministers, and in creation and providence. His voice is sounding everywhere; and, in order to fellowship with him, thou must have the ear that hears, and the heart that believes what he says unto thee; and thou must also have a tongue that responds to his voice, for there can be no true communion without mutual communication. Do you not perceive the kinship of the two words, *communion* and *communication*, communion and converse? This there must be, or there will be no true fellowship.

Now think of our illustration again, but transfer it to the higher sphere. You are living in the house, and you are yourself sick of the plague; yet, suffering in that fashion, in the house where the one business carried on is the healing of the sick, I will suppose that you refuse to put yourself under the care of the Son, who is the great Physician. If you despise his remedies, or delay receiving them, you cannot be said to have any true fellowship with him. Evidently, you do not appreciate his efforts on behalf of others, or you would be willing to accept his services on your own account. It is his business to save, yet you are not saved. He is quite close to you, and he is able, with a single touch of his hand, to heal you, yet you will not permit his sacred skill to be exercised upon you. Then, clearly, you do not believe in him, for you do not desire to submit yourself to him, and it is equally clear that you have no fellowship with him, and cannot have any. If we are to have any fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ, we must, first of all, surrender these poor sinful souls of ours into his dear hands, and we must go to the Father, and say to him, "Father, we have sinned;" and as we gaze, by faith, upon the atoning sacrifice, we must say, "But, although we must confess that we have sinned, there is the blood that makes atonement for sin; therefore, Father, accept us, because we put our trust in thine only-begotten Son." This is essential to true fellowship, and, as you will see, it is a part of it. So, here you are, first of all, in communication with the Father and the Son, and, secondly, reconciled to God by the death of his Son.—healed of the awful, soul-destroying plague of sin; and

thus you have taken two steps upon the great highway of fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ; and you can sing, with Toplady,—

“For thy free electing favour,
Thee, O Father, we adore!
Jesus, our atoning Saviour,
Thee we worship evermore!”

But it is needful, further, supposing us to be living in the house with this Father and Son, and desiring to have full fellowship with them, that we should have *an intelligent apprehension of the work they are doing*. Suppose we know, as a matter of general knowledge, that they are healing the sick, but we are not aware of the self-denials to which that well-beloved Son has exposed himself, or of the bountiful heart of that generous Father, who was willing even to yield up his Son to endure all the perils of the plague for the sake of those who were smitten by it. If we do not know as much as this, we cannot have anything like full fellowship with the Father and the Son; but, in proportion as we study the details of their working, and perceive the adaptation of what they are doing to the great end they have in view, we shall be sure to have fellowship with them. So, beloved, when you are yourselves saved, study to know more and more about both Christ and the Father. Dive deeply into the great mystery of the divine purposes of love and mercy. See how the Father ordained, before the foundation of the world, that, in the race of mankind, he would find exponents of his boundless love, who will make known to principalities and powers, in the heavenly places, throughout eternity, the manifold riches of his grace. See, too, how he laid upon his Son the work of healing this sin-smitten world. Study every detail that you can ascertain concerning the Father and the Son; the minutest touch upon the canvas is worthy of a century's study, so full is every point of deep mystery and rich instruction to the soul. And I am persuaded that, as you increase in the knowledge of the Father, and of his Son Jesus Christ, through the revelation of the Divine Spirit, you will also increase your fellowship with the Father and with his Son.

We advance still further *when this work, which is being done by those with whom we are in such close contact, commands our intense approbation and admiration*. Turning, for a minute, simply to our illustration, think of the heroic father and of his self-denying son, and say to yourself, “How wonderful it is that these plague-stricken people should be allowed to come, and howl and rage against him under his very window; yet, all the while, he is living for them;—how strange it is that these very people, who, in the madness that follows from their disease, even seek the life of his son, the great physician, nevertheless are the objects of that great physician's sedulous care, and he is ready to lay down his life for them if haply he may save them.” You would thus find your heart going out in admiration of that father and son, and such undeserved and disinterested love as theirs would bring you into fellowship with

them. Now lift the illustration again into the higher sphere, and see, through it, the grand design of God to make his foes his friends, to change rebels into loyal courtiers, to make ingrates into sons and daughters, and to uplift the heirs of wrath, and cause them to sit with him as kings and priests upon his throne. When you see how Christ comes down to raise this world up from the gulf into which it had fallen, and, like another Atlas, only greater far, to bear upon his shoulders the weight of the world's sin, you cannot help admiring him, and as you admire and approve, you enter into a still higher measure of fellowship with the Father and with his Son.

You get to a stage yet further on when, at last, *you are able to enter into sympathy with the Divine Workers.* Suppose (to go back to our illustration,) you lived in the house with that father and son, and saw this work of mercy going on day after day,—poor starving and dying people being picked up, placed in the hospital, and healed, and that great physician, the son, perpetually suffering in order that he might heal them, enduring all manner of insults and ignominy at their hands, yet ever determining to save them,—you would come, at last, to feel such sympathy with both father and son that the plague-stricken people would be almost as much the object of your care as of theirs. You would be worked up into enthusiasm for the poor sufferers, and you would feel that it was such a blessed work to help in caring for them that, if it were possible, you would wish to be engaged in it. You begin to take an interest in all the details of the service, and you rejoice as you hear of one and another of the sick ones being restored. You feel that you must love the self-denying physician who is giving up comfort, ease, honour, everything, to save the suffering and dying people. You feel such sympathy with him in the work that he is doing that you could kiss his feet; and when you hear of his being despised and rejected, you feel that you could wash his feet with your tears of regret that he should be treated in so shameful a fashion. You are getting into fellowship with him now; and when I look at my dear Lord and Master, and think of the Father and the Son planning and working with heart and soul for the salvation of the chosen, and when I see sinners saved one by one, or even by hundreds delivered from sin, and made fit for heaven, my soul feels a deep sympathy with this glorious work. Do you not also feel it, dear friends? Do you not wish that sinners may be saved? Do you not pray that they may be? Does not your heart feel intense sympathy with the eternal purpose of the Father, and the gracious work of the Saviour? If so, you are having fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

I can suppose that, living in the house with that father and son, *you would want to go further still, and to share their work.* If you had been cured by the skill of the physician, you would feel yourself so intensely sympathetic with him in the great work that he is carrying on that, somewhat timidly and humbly, you would venture to say, "Can I be of any use? Can I carry the medicine, or put on the bandages, or give a cup of cold water to a fevered

lip, or wipe a tear from a weeping eye, or sit up at night with the sick who need to be watched and tended? Or, can I even clean the floor of the house, or unloose the latches of the physician's shoes?"

"My God, I feel the mournful scene;
My bowels yearn o'er dying men;
And fain my pity would reclaim,
And snatch the firebrands from the flame."

And if, as will be sure to be the case when you are doing something for Christ, *some of the patients begin to mock at you, as they mocked at him*, that will reveal to you another phase of fellowship with him. Then you will understand why he was so patient, for you will need to ask him to make you patient; and when your words of warning, or instruction, or comfort are rejected, as his were, you will go to him, and say, "O Saviour, I understand now a little of what thy griefs were when thou wast despised and rejected of men, for they have rejected thy Word which thou didst put into my lips." In struggling to do good to others, you will meet with such rebuffs, misrepresentations, difficulties, and direct oppositions, that you will go to the Saviour, and say to him, "O my Lord, I can understand thee better now;—not that I am anything like what I ought to be, but even my failures help me to see more of thy sovereign patience and thy mighty love. O thou Divine Self-denier,—thou wondrous Self-sacrificer,—I should never have had such fellowship with thee as I now have if thou hadst not permitted me to take some humble part in this thy great and glorious work!"

So now, you see, you have reached a point a long way ahead of where we started. You are now enjoying fellowship with the Father, and with the Son, because you have become a co-worker with God. We put our puny hand to the great work which he has undertaken, and he strengthens our weak hand to do marvels for his name's sake. He worketh mightily within us, and so we are able to work for him, and to have fellowship with him.

To come to the climax of all, I will suppose that you are living in that house of mercy which has been my figure all along, and that you throw your whole soul so completely into the work that is carried on there that you say to the father and son, "This work so fully commands my sympathy, and so delights my heart, that I am quite carried away with enthusiasm for it. I admire the characters and I love the persons of those with whom I dwell; and now I ask that all I am, and all I have, may be used for the furtherance of this work, that I may not be reckoned merely as a lodger in this house, but be regarded as one of the family, and that, from henceforth, I, in my poor, humble capacity,—for I am less than nothing,—may never be personally mentioned again, but may be considered as part and parcel of this great mysterious firm, whose existence means nothing but good to the city, and whose influence is all being employed for the health of the inhabitants." You know what I mean,—lifting the illustration to the higher sphere,—and it is well if you can say to the Lord, at last, "My Lord, henceforth

for me to live shall be to do what thou wilt, and to give myself wholly up to seek those objects for which Christ lived here below, and upon which the Father's heart has ever been set. Father, thou wilt that the truth should be known wherever lies have at present the dominion; then give me grace, I pray thee, to will it too, and to publish thy truth everywhere according to the measure of my ability. Thou wilt that the nations of the earth should be subdued unto thy Son, and become his loyal subjects; then, I pray thee to put me into the ranks of the legions by whom thou wilt achieve this glorious victory." Brethren and sisters in Christ, you will indeed have fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, when you are nothing, and Christ is everything;—when you do not live to make money, or to attain to earthly honour, or to gain comfort, or anything else for yourselves; but when each of you can say, "This one thing will I do, for Christ will I live, and for Christ will I be content even to die, so that, to the utmost bounds of the earth his name and fame may be made known."

"I want to live as one who knows
Thy fellowship of love;
As one whose eyes can pierce beyond
The pearl-built gates above.

"As one who daily speaks to thee,
And hears thy voice divine
With depths of tenderness declare,
'Beloved, thou art mine!'"

II. Now, in the second place, I have briefly to answer the second question,—HOW MAY FELLOWSHIP WITH THE FATHER, AND WITH THE SON, BE ENJOYED IN THE CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER?

As you all know, the Lord's supper is the memorial feast in which we are to show, or proclaim, the Lord's death "till he come." Come he will, and our hearts cry to him, "Even so, come quickly, good Master!" This supper sets forth his death, and the way in which we derive benefit from it, namely, by receiving him spiritually into our souls even as we take the bread and wine literally into our bodies, and assimilate them so that they become part of ourselves. Well, then, how can we have fellowship with God in showing forth the death of Christ by means of this memorial supper?

I think we can do so, first, *by coming to the conclusion that the sacrifice of Christ was an absolute necessity.* We are fully persuaded that God the Father would never have given up his only-begotten Son to die for human guilt, if there had been any other way of saving lost sinners; and also that Jesus Christ would never have taken upon himself the awful burden of human guilt, and agreed to be bruised of the Father, if it had not been absolutely essential that he should die, or that man should, or that justice should; it must have been one of the three. God the Father agreed with God the Son that this colossal sacrifice was necessary; my soul, dost thou also agree that it was necessary? Dost thou see that there was no loophole for thine escape except through the bleeding Saviour's wounds? Wilt thou admit now, with all thine heart, that the

Father's wisdom was right, and that the Son's wisdom was right? Has the Spirit of God taught thee that this was the best plan of salvation that could possibly have been devised? Looking all around, hast thou come to the conclusion that there is no salvation by works, and no salvation by tears, and no salvation anywhere but by the blood of God's only-begotten and well-beloved Son? If any of you have come to that conclusion, you have thereby entered into fellowship with the Father, and with the Son, for they have long ago come to the same conclusion.

Then, next, dear friends, while you are sitting around the communion table, *endeavour so to think of the sufferings of Christ, that you will, in your measure, enter into the moods of his mind while he was suffering for you.* As he felt a great horror of sin, pray the Lord to make you feel intense horror of it, and let the very thought of it wound you as it wounded him. He felt the shame of sin; then ask the Holy Spirit to teach you how shameful it is. In your mind and heart, crown sin with a crown of thorns like that with which it crowned your Lord; and spit at sin, and scoff at sin, even as sin did scoff and spit at your Lord. Yet further, our Lord Jesus felt that justice must be honoured; so feel in your soul, as you come to the communion, that the justice of God must be honoured, and magnified, and glorified. Have fellowship with Christ in feeling that, cost what it may, God must never be unjust. Agree to that in your heart of hearts, and you will be having fellowship with the Father, and with the Son, while you are so agreeing. Go over, in your mind, all the griefs and woes that your dear Lord endured, and recollect how he resolved that, for the joy that was set before him, they were all things to be despised. Do you feel that any losses and crosses which you may have to bear for his sake, or any scorn or persecution that may ever come upon you because you belong to Christ, are things that are only to be reckoned as the small dust of the balance in comparison with the glory of God? Then, you are drinking of Christ's cup, and being baptized with his baptism, and having fellowship with him in his sufferings. Let your thoughts travel along the road to Gethsemane, and from Gethsemane to the accursed gibbet on the hill of Calvary; in your meditation, follow your Lord, and ask him to let you drink of the brook by the way, as he did, that you also may lift up your head; and in that way you will have fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. You may even adopt the rapturous language of Faber, and sing,—

"I love to kiss each print where Christ
Did set his pilgrim feet;
Nor can I fear that blessed path,
Whose traces are so sweet."

Then, again, beloved, I pray the Holy Spirit *to help you, and to help me, to glorify God concerning the death of Christ while we are at his table.* As you eat the bread, and drink the wine, think of what Christ suffered, and of the mysterious way in which his sufferings have brought glory to the Father's name. I do verily

believe that, when Christ bore the sins of his people up to the tree, and away from the tree, the justice of God was more honoured than it would have been if all the elect had been sent to hell for ever. If our sins had been punished upon ourselves, with the utmost rigour of the divine law, that law would not have been so honoured, throughout the entire universe of intelligent beings, as it now must be when they hear that God himself would sooner pay the penalty of sin than allow his law to be broken with impunity. O august death of Christ, in which God himself becomes the sacrificial Victim, and bleeds and dies sooner than that, on the spotless tablets of his law, any stain should be made, even though it should be by the finger of his mercy! Glorify God, then, praise him, and let your whole souls extol him for this wondrous arrangement of grace,—

“So just to God, so safe for man,”—

for so you will be having fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. You probably remember that the line I just quoted was written by Dr. Watts in praise of the gospel, and I hope that you can say with him,—

“What if we trace the globe around,
And search from Britain to Japan,
There shall be no religion found
So just to God, so safe for man.

“How well thy blessèd truths agree!
How wise and holy thy commands!
Thy promises, how firm they be!
How firm our hope and comfort stands

“Should all the forms that men devise
Assault my faith with treacherous art,
I'd call them vanity and lies,
And bind the gospel to my heart.”

Next, you can enter into fellowship, at the communion table, *by loving Christ, your Mediator, as well as by glorifying God the Father.* You know that God loves Jesus Christ; I mean, the Man Christ Jesus, God and Man in one Person. He loves him, not only in his essential Godhead, as he ever must love him, but he also loves him for his work's sake. With what delight do the Father's eyes ever rest on his Son! How sweetly does he say to him, “Well done!” How does he delight to honour and glorify him! Do not you also feel something of the same sort of love to Christ as you gather around his table? Ask the Spirit of God to cause you to be enamoured of Christ, and to make him to be “altogether lovely” in your eyes. Pray for such a view of him that your inmost heart shall melt under the divine passion of love to your dear Lord. Let his wounds be the charm to win you, let his spotless character be the beauty to enthral you; and when you thus love Christ, you will perceive that, as God the Father loves Christ even more than that,

you will have fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

We do not invite you to come and kneel around the communion table, for there is nothing upon it to be worshipped; but when the breaking of bread is being celebrated, we ask you to sit as much at your ease as you can, just as the last supper was instituted by our Lord. Those who gathered round that table reclined in the Oriental posture of repose. We cannot do that, nor would it be in harmony with our usual idea of what is reverent and seemly. At the paschal feast, they stood with their loins girded, and their staves in their hands, for they were about to depart in haste into the wilderness. You have no need to do that, but you may sit at this table as one who is at rest, and so you may have fellowship with God, for do you not know that this feast celebrates Christ's rest? His blood has been shed, his body broken, he has become food for our souls, his redemption work is finished. He has gone his way until he shall come, the second time, to drink the wine new in the kingdom of his Father. Christ rests; so, if you also rest, you will be in sympathy with his finished work.

Remember also that God rests. When Noah offered a sacrifice to God, Jehovah smelled a sweet savour of rest,—not in Noah's sacrifice, but in what Noah's sacrifice typified and symbolized; that is, in the sacrifice of Christ. If I may use such an expression concerning thee, O blessed God, thy Sabbath was broken by man's sin. It grieved God that he had made man, because he so rebelled against him, and dishonoured him; and, therefore, the Lord had no rest. But when he saw Christ on the cross,—a Man, who had done all his will, suffering all his will,—God, as well as man, bearing human sin in his own person,—it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and to put him to grief; but when he had done it, and the Son had finished his sacrifice, and come home, then the Father rested. He could rest in his love, and rejoice over his Church with singing, for the ransom price for her redemption was paid, the battle was fought, and the victory won for ever. Sin was overcome, the old serpent's head was broken, hell was vanquished, and death was doomed to die; and it is now only a matter of time when the gleaming banners of Christ, lit with the light of victory, shall be borne aloft after the final fight of Armageddon; and when that is over, there shall go up this mighty shout, which every star shall hear, while heaven's heights shall echo and re-echo the strain, and the deeps of hell are stirred with the wondrous chorus of the redeemed, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth,"—reigneth because of the cross,—reigneth because Christ was there able to say, "It is finished."

Come then, beloved, and rest, for so you will have fellowship with God himself. Let no sense of sin disturb you,—no distracting thoughts annoy you. Say to yourself, "God is satisfied with Christ's work, and so am I. God has said, 'It is enough;' and what is enough for the infinite God is surely enough for me." The Lord bless you, as you come to his table, for his Son's sake! Amen.
