

Title: Face to Face  
Text: 2 John 12-13  
Theme: Caring for one another  
Series: 2 John  
Prop Stmtnt: True fellowship is the path to complete joy

Read Text:

Henry David Thoreau, a 19<sup>th</sup> century naturalist and philosopher, went on a two-year retreat and wrote an essay about it in which he said, *"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear...."* Did you hear that? Thoreau did not want to get to the end of his life only to discover that he missed the point of it and that he had not really lived. "I did not wish to live what was not life."

Beloved, some of you are living distracted lives that keep you from living life. I do not want you to get to the end only to find out that what you lived was not life. You are busy, so busy, so distracted, so owned by your phones and by the image you are trying to create. Here is the sermon in a sentence: ***Intentionally engaging in encouraging relationships with your brothers and sisters in Christ, makes much of Christ, builds your church and is a preview of glory.***

The apostle John knows what matters. He spent several years of his life with Christ. He walked, talked and ate with the very author of life. John is now reflecting on those years and realizing just how amazing that was. His letters (1, 2, 3 John) are written in this sense of awe and growing awareness of not only what that was about, but now a growing awareness of what life is about. This is seen in 1 John 1.1-4

*That which was from the beginning, (Christ) which we have heard, (Christ) which we have seen with our eyes, (Christ) which we have looked upon and have touched with our hands, (Christ) concerning the word of life (Christ) – the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us – that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.*

I am writing to you about Christ who is the Son of God. Jesus Christ enjoys perfectly, eternal and infinite fellowship with his Father, and we enjoyed fellowship with him and in fact, I am writing all of this to you in order that we might have fellowship with one another which is made possible by the fellowship that God enjoys as God. The fellowship that God enjoys as God is the basis of and the fuel of our fellowship with God and with one another. Fellowship with God and with one another is the hope and joy of glory. Therefore, our fellowship together as believers is a taste of the glory of heaven.

Have you been with a believer who is dying? It is hard and yet fascinating. One moment here, then, glory! But, how do we know that? Really. How do we know that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord? Is this one of those things that you want to be, so you say it over and over until it feels like it is true, or is it actually true? This is the point that John is making. The life of Jesus did not start here on earth. Jesus came here from there. The life of Jesus is from eternity past with the Father and in fellowship with the Father and will be forever in fellowship with the Father. He came here, SO THAT we could join in the fellowship of God (Father, Son and Spirit). That is the greatest treasure. Anything that distracts you from that treasure is taking you away from the highest good.

The relationship that we enjoy as believers is hugely important because it reflects our understanding of the relationship that God enjoys as God, the relationship that God enjoys with us and the relationship that we will enjoy forever with him. This is entire point of life. If you don't get this, you don't get it at all. So, Thoreau went on a 2-year retreat into the woods in order to find the meaning life, John would say, go to church, because it's there, the meaning of life is seen and experienced in the life of a healthy church. That may surprise even some of you. So, let's do a 30,000-foot overview and then dig into the text.

- 1) Heaven (the dwelling place of God)
- 2) Earth (the dwelling place of God with his people)
- 3) The Garden (the Temple of God)
- 4) The Tabernacle (the dwelling place of God with his people)
- 5) Jesus (God with man and God and man)
- 6) The Church (the temple of God, the dwelling place of God with his people)
- 7) The Consummation (the eternal dwelling place of God with his people)

Explain: face to face (mouth to mouth)

1. **In person fellowship is intended by God.** (12a)

The letter of 2 John was intended to be a preview for the visit of John to this congregation. John knew that he could have written so much more, but his plan, his hope was to come and visit them and talk, "face to face." That expression speaks of a relationship that is so personal and so close that there is nothing between it. This is how God describes what our relationship with him is to be like.

*"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."* (Matthew 5.8)

*"Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."* (1 John 3.2)

*"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known."* (1 Corinthians 13.12)

So, when John uses this phrase, “face to face” to describe his relationship with these other believers, it is a fruit, a by-product, an expression of the relationship that he has with God and that he will enjoy with God perfectly, forever. Since God is a fellowship of the Trinity, the pinnacle of our lives is found in experiencing fellowship now.

**A. God is face to face.**

The Father, Son and Spirit, enjoy perfect, unhindered fellowship and unbridled joy in one another.

**B. God made us to be face to face with him.**

God created the earth as a sanctuary, a temple, a place where God would live with, be with and enjoy his people. But, we rebelled against God. We wanted to be God. We wanted to have the right to live how we wanted. Every single one of us have done that. Our rebellion has been devastating, not only on a cosmic scale but on a deeply personal level. We disbelieved God. We disbelieved that God really made us in order to enjoy us and delight in us. We sinned. We rejected his law and broke his commands. Because God is righteous, and his righteousness is perfectly just, God has to punish our sin. God cannot and will not pretend that our rebellion is a small matter. But, how can God punish you for your sin without condemning you? God is perfectly just to condemn you, but God’s plan was to have a people that he could enjoy face to face forever. But, how can God look upon us face to face when our sin is so repulsive and how can we, as sinners look face-to-face with God and not be consumed by his infinite holiness? From our perspective, either God overlooks his holiness so that we can hang out with him, or he punishes us for our cosmic treason. If God overlooks his holiness so that we can hang out with him, then is our fellowship with him, really fellowship?

Some of you know what that is like in your family. You “go along” in order to “get along” but when you do that, it is in order to keep peace at a family event. The issues are not addressed, the problems are not resolved and the friendship and relationship is not deep. You keep things on the surface. Is that what God does? Is our rebellion in the “don’t bring that up” zone? No.

God did the incredible! God sent Christ to come to this world in order to become one of us so that he could do what we should have done. Christ lived a perfectly righteous life. And he did that in our place. Of course, he was hated for it, rejected and condemned to die, which he did, in order to pay for the sins of every single person who would ever believe in him. The death of Jesus was the offering up of his perfectly righteous life that paid the debt of our sins, in full. Whoever repents of their rebellion and trusts in Jesus as the only One who can save them, is saved from their sin and declared righteous by God. Debt paid. Rebellion forgiven. Sin atoned. Declared righteous. Adopted forever. We are washed clean. We are made clean. God can look upon us and we can look upon him face to face. The pure in heart will see God. The pure in heart are those who receive a new heart.

When Christ returns, or when we are with him, we will be like him because we will see him as he is. It sounds like our seeing Christ is the catalyst that completes our sanctification into making us like him. When we see Christ and are face to face with him, we will be made like him, which means that our capacity to believe him and love him will be unhindered. We will be face to face. There will be no doubt, no hinge of wondering if he really loves us and at the same our love for him will be set free.

I have a couple of friends who are well known. They speak at conferences, write books, are interviewed by all sorts of media outlets, etc. I'm not. But, they talk to me as if I am their friend, and to my shame, I didn't really believe that I really mattered to them. I figured that they were nice because, well, they are generally nice, and that I was a general recipient of their niceness. So, I was their friend in that they knew my name, we had some conversations, but, I should not delude myself into thinking that it was anything more than that. Is that how you see God? God is generally nice and therefore, you are the general recipient of his niceness, but don't delude yourself into thinking that it is really personal. Is that how it is for you? Now, over time, these friends have said things and done things that have made me realize that they genuinely care about me and that we really are friends. How much more with God! This is the relationship of all relationships and the joy of all joys. God knows us completely and loves us completely!

### **C. God made us to be face to face with him and with one another.**

So, John is saying that, I could write all of this stuff down and send it to you, but it wouldn't be the same. I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to come to you and talk face to face. Face to face fellowship is what God made us for, therefore, we need to prioritize this, protect it and practice it. When I say face-to-face, I don't mean simply that we see another physically. Face-to-face means heart-to-heart. If we don't prioritize face-to-face, we will never have heart to heart.

Back during the lockdown, we locked down as well. On Sunday's I would preach to an empty Worship Center, and it would be live-streamed so that I could at least feed you in that way, but it was not the same. That is why I said to you, this is not church. On-line church is not church. I could not see you while I preached and determine if what I was saying was connecting. We could not see one another as we sang or serve one another by giving space in our pew or in our hearts by talking with and praying for one another after the service. Virtual church is an oxymoron. However, it sure seems appealing at times, right? There is no effort to get up and go. It is so convenient. You can put it on and make breakfast, get some dusting done, pay some bills, check your email, see who else is watching on-line, text them about the lame sermon, or doze in your recliner. Is that what church is or has become? Think about this. Did Jesus die for that? If church can be virtual, then why didn't Jesus die on the cross virtually? Why is in person so important when in person is so challenging?

After all, some of you have an opinion about Covid, vaccines, masks and politics. In this church family, there are people who do not share all of the same opinions as you do on each of those. And when we gather together, it is possible that some people share some of their opinions

about these matters with you and you are tempted to make your views about those things more important than our belief about the gospel. But, in the on-line world, you can find those who do. You can find people who think just like you do about each of those areas and you can be affirmed in your views and together you can pity those who do not share them. You have, what appears to be a fellowship, but as long as it stays virtual, you have very little invested in it. It is so easy to imagine all of those people in that Facebook group as being smart, sophisticated, savvy, and well, just about perfect in every way. That is easy to imagine because you never talk with them face to face, smell their bad breath, or body odor, or see them snap at their spouse, or wear ugly clothes. It is not real. Besides, if anyone in that on-line world gets a little too weird, you can just defriend them and move on looking for different friends. But is that really a fellowship? No. Church is not church without face-to-face fellowship. But that face-to-face fellowship brings challenges, but facing those challenges and working through them and not running from them, while hard is SO worth it.

## **2. In person fellowship is the path to joy. (12b)**

A friend of mine took his wife out to dinner for Valentine's Day and he said, it was incredible. We were in this restaurant with all of these couples, who were each on their phones. They were together, but not really. Texting can be useful; it can also be a way to avoid having to actually talk with a person. John says, I could write everything down, but then I would miss out on seeing you face to face. I would miss out on seeing how your faith is affecting your life. Seeing faithfulness in the life of another believer is hugely encouraging. That is why in person fellowship is the path to joy.

Cathi and I went on a little vacation to the Finger Lake region of upstate New York, which is known for wonderful hiking and waterfalls, which means that everyone wants to get their picture taken by these waterfalls. So, this is supposed to be us, getting away. And, (no exaggeration) we were not at our first destination for more than 5 minutes when we were taking another couple's picture in front of a waterfall, which led to a conversation and another and another which ultimately resulted in us being invited to their home for dinner. The man was a professor at Cornell University and had recently come to faith in Christ. So, while we enjoyed hiking and taking pictures, the highlight of our trip was spending an evening with this man and his wife and hearing how they came to faith in Christ and sharing in their lives and being encouraged by them and seeking to be an encouragement to them. We were able to look at them and they at us while we ate together and talked about the Lord. That evening was another reminder that following Jesus is worth it, because there are millions of those meetings that await us in glory.

## **3. True fellowship breeds more fellowship. (13)**

In a month I am going to preach a sermon that is going to sound very similar to this one because 3 John ends the same way 2 John does. But, in that sermon I will spend more time on this point. Look at verse 13. "The children of your elect sister greet you." In other words, the church where John is writing from is sending their greetings to the church John is writing to.

This church is concerned about that church. A church that is experiencing good fellowship together is a church that cares about other churches. We cannot have enough good churches. Good churches are not competition. They are our joy! We need to pray for churches to be healthy and for more good churches. Do you want to help expand the influence of the gospel through our church and other healthy churches? Prioritize meaningful fellowship with one another. If you are too busy to spend meaningful time face to face with other believers in order to encourage them and be encouraged by them, you are wasting your life.

Concluding questions:

- 1) Do you have regular, meaningful fellowship with other believers?
- 2) Is your fellowship honest, heart-to-heart?
- 3) What do you need to do to make this a priority?
- 4) When will you start?