

1525
 Sermon preached by Mr. J. Raven at Shaw's Corner, Redhill,
 on Sunday evening January 13th, 1952.

"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ". I John 1.3.

The Apostle says "That which was from the beginning". You remember he says in his gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life". "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ".

The ministers of God are not favoured now, as John and the apostles in his day were favoured, to see the Lord with their bodily eyes and hear Him with their bodily ears, handle Him as John here speaks; yet in another manner they see Him - they see Him by faith as He is revealed to them by the Holy Spirit. It is a very necessary qualification for the gospel ministry that a man should have some acquaintance with Christ as revealed to his heart, first in the want of Him. How shall a minister preach Christ if he has never been faced with his own deep want of Him, if he has never been convinced that Jesus is the one thing needful, that without Him he must perish? First of all a minister needs to be convinced of his want of Christ as a Saviour, and then he needs to have Christ sweetly revealed in his heart by the Holy Spirit as the divinely sufficient and most gracious answer to all the necessities of his condition. O what a full, free, divinely suited and sufficient Christ we have revealed in the gospel, and this is the Christ that the Holy Ghost reveals in the heart, and this was the Christ of whom John spoke. "Which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life". You remember how Peter addressed the people of God who had never seen the Lord with their bodily eyes, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory". John, in our text, says "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you". It is important that a man should be able to preach a known Christ. How empty, how destitute of life and savour that ministry must be when Christ is unknown in the minister's heart. There may be many words about Christ, much mention of His name, there may a putting forth

of gospel notions and they may be very correct, but if Christ is not in the minister's soul as his hope of glory, if Christ be not dwelling in his heart by faith and ruling in his affections, how shall he preach Him? I remember hearing the late Mr. Popham say that it had been for a long, long time his prayer that he might be a good minister of Jesus Christ, "But" the good man said, "I am afraid I shall die without getting an answer". And with immeasurably more reason I have many, many fears that I shall die without getting an answer to that prayer. O to be a good minister of Jesus Christ, to be made manifest in the consciences of at least some of my hearers, that I am a true minister of Jesus Christ.

"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you that ye also may have fellowship with us". The apostle, writing I think to the Philippians, gave thanks for their fellowship in the gospel until now - their fellowship in the gospel. Now there is such a thing as fellowship in the gospel. As ministers of Jesus Christ preach and the Lord blesses their testimony to the hearts of some of their hearers, so that sinners are quickened and brought to the true knowledge of the Lord Jesus, to an assurance that He is their Lord and Saviour, these people are brought into the fellowship of the gospel. O is there not something very attractive about it - the fellowship of the gospel? Here John says, "That ye may have fellowship with us". I want just to look for a little while at this fellowship this evening, what it is to have fellowship with the apostles and with the people of God in all ages as well as in the day in which we live. For the fellowship of God's people in these days is not confined to their contemporaries, it is a fellowship with those who have long passed the flood.

This fellowship first of all begins when the Holy Ghost quickens the soul. When He quickens the soul He imparts a true, a very solemn knowledge of the sinfulness of sin and of the soul's hopeless ruin by sin. A man under the teaching of the Holy Spirit is made to feel himself undone, to feel his lost condition, and as people are brought into this they begin to have a measure of fellowship with those who have gone before, and they find that the confessions and complaints and the petitions of saints of God of old time are fitted to their lips and to their cases. For instance, they find the language of David in the 51st Psalm and in other places to be eminently suited to their condition and to their feelings. They perhaps have to take up language such as we find in Psalm 51 and in other places. "For thy Name's sake O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great". "Deliver me from all my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish". If thou, Lord,

shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared". Then with Isaiah, notably in the 6th chapter of his prophecy, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." There is many another in the Old Testament. There is Daniel, his prayer and supplication and confession. There is that of Ezra and many others, and these things are wonderfully fitted both to the feelings and to the cases of God's people under a solemn exercise on account of their sinnership. It is wonderful to be brought into that fellowship. It is not comfortable; there is a good deal of bitterness felt in it. Sometimes a poor thing may find his exercises so painful that he will ask the question, "Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul?" Why is light given to a man whose way is hid?" He cannot understand it. But where the Holy Spirit is thus teaching it is to profit. "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law", and nothing would rejoice the heart of a minister of Jesus Christ more than to find here and there among his hearers, one who was exercised after this sort. With what music in his heart would the minister lay his head upon his pillow this night if he could know that certain people who are laid upon his heart were the subjects of this solemn, profitable exercise. I remember a friend of mine in Guernsey, who under the early dealings of God with his soul could not make himself out. He tried to talk to people hoping to get some help. The curate could not help him, he was as ignorant as possible and as dead as a door post, and other people were the same, until at last he met with one who went away and said, 'I believe so-and-so is born again'. Where the Spirit of God once begins this work of grace in the soul he will never forsake it. He that hath begun the work of grace will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. "I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal".

"Kind Jesus empties whom He fills,
And quickens whom He slays,
Each legal hope He kindly kills
To teach us gospel praise"

Now, not only will you have fellowship with Bible saints who have gone before and godly men whose writings we have still with us, but you will have fellowship with God's people in the present day. This will make the prayer meeting very attractive to you. You will come to love the prayer meeting because you will find the brethren who pray express the very feelings of your heart. They might be praying inside you sometimes, they seem to know all about you. It might be yourself speaking,

their language does so suit your condition and your feeling. I say this makes you love the prayer meeting. The prayer meeting is a delightful place when people are in these exercises and when they experience this union of heart with those who pray, when they can say, 'O when Mr. so-and-so prays it does suit me and enters right into the necessities of my case'. This is fellowship, and very precious fellowship it is, although so far there is not much comfort in it. Yet there is a little comfort in hearing one you esteem as a man of God making just the sort of complaints you make yourself, and the sort of confessions that are pressed out of you. But you cannot rest in that.

But then there is not only fellowship in that, but as you get some inkling of what Christ is, as you get what Bunyan calls "some blinks of Jesus Christ", how that draws out your heart to Him and you begin to have fellowship with His people in that same experience. When the apostle Paul, for instance, expresses the pantings of his heart after Christ, "that I may win Christ", "that I may be found in Him", "that I may know Him" and so on; when he talks of "pressing toward the mark", O how the heart goes with him. When you have got just a blink of Christ it has so attracted your heart that you cannot be satisfied without Him. 'Oh, I must have Christ - if I have not Christ I am most miserable and poor and destitute and lost, but having Jesus, I have an immortal store'. Well, as you begin to feel thus toward Christ you find that among God's people there are those who give expression to things that exactly fit your own feelings and exercises and the desires of your own heart. You find that what they say of Christ answers to the little blink you have of Him and the desires they have toward His name are your desires. The love that they have toward Him answers to what is burning, if it be but feebly, in your own breast, and nothing will satisfy you but a heart's fill of Jesus Christ. "Jesus, reveal Thyself to me", to my heart. You find how precious are the hymns in our hymn-book in which various men of God have set out their feelings and their hearts' adoring worship of the Lord Jesus Christ, their sense of the need of Him, and you find those things do so meet your case. It is with you, as when in the early days of Christ's ministry, when He had found Philip, Philip found Nathanael, saying, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph". You know Nathanael's heart was attracted by what he heard and he went with Philip; and you know the issue, how the Lord said of him, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael said unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee". You see how these two men

were brought into fellowship together in that mutual attraction they felt towards the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us".

Then again, when the Lord leads you a step further, you do not behold Christ merely as it were at a distance, as a distant shining light, but you get a nearer view of Him. You experience what it is to find rest in Him. You get a discovery of His love, His blood, His precious righteousness and all that He is, that you feel your heart completely satisfied with Him. "Jesus, my all, to Heaven is gone" - "Jesus, my all". He is all I want, all I need. "All I need in Jesus dwells, and there it dwells for me". O how full your heart will be, how satisfying you find Christ to be!

"Shall I envy then the miser
Doting on his golden store?
Sure I am, or should be, wiser;
I am rich, 'tis he is poor".

Christ is very satisfying when he discovers Himself, when He says, "I am thy God, I am thy Redeemer, I bought thee with my precious blood, thou art mine and mine for ever". Well, in this you will enter into fellowship with the people of God as they are thus favoured, and you will find this too, although your own attainments may seem very, very small, yet you will find a sweet delight sometimes in hearing the people of God speak of the glimpses they have had of Christ and the visits of His grace; how He has revealed Himself to them and how they have lived upon Him by faith; what they have seen in Him, and how their hearts have rejoiced in Him. As you listen to what they have to say, your heart begins to burn within you; you find a sweetness in it, a wonderful sweetness in it, a most attractive sweetness, and you burn with longing for the day to come when you shall experience the like favour. You look upon them as most blessed people, "O that my soul were in your soul's stead", and so you are encouraged by their testimony to follow on, to trust in God, to believe even that you will yet praise Him for the health of His countenance.

"The time of love will come,
When we shall clearly see,
Not only that he shed his blood,
But each shall say, "for me".

You are enabled to say this in substance, "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope". This is fellowship, fellowship with the people of God, fellowship in the gospel.

It is a wonderful thing too, to have fellowship in gospel liberty. You may say, 'The preacher is getting quite beyond me now, I have not got to that yet, I have not been favoured yet to walk in gospel liberty, I have not been able to say yet,

"The terrors of law and of God
 With me can have nothing to do;
 My Saviour's obedience and blood
 Hide all my transgressions from view".

You may not have been brought to that yet, but do you desire it? Is it the point you would be at? Is that what you long for? You may see at a distance that fair, fair land of gospel liberty, that large, that wealthy place in which the Lord does lead His people, and you have longed to enter into it, and yet fear you never will, although you may have had some blinks now and then, a little budding of hope sometimes. You may for a moment sometimes have felt really happy by reason of the hope that sprang up within you, but you have not got all you want yet. You want to be brought into that sweet liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free, and to experience what the apostle did (and mark, he came at it through affliction) "There is therefore, now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death". "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit". I say, does that attract you? Can you say that nothing less than an entrance into that grace will satisfy your heart? Well, in these things I say there is fellowship with the people of God, as your heart sometimes is made even a little to praise the Lord.

"Sometimes a light surprises
 The Christian while he sings,
 It is the Lord who rises
 With healing in His wings.
 When comforts are declining,
 He gives the soul again
 A season of clear shining,
 To cheer it after rain".

The Lord does give some songs, and you may be surprised sometimes to find yourselves for a few moments singing a sweet song of praise. The Lord pays surprise visits to poor people when they least expect it and feel least worthy of it. They are amazed that He should so come to them, but His visits are never to be forgotten. Well, it is wonderful to know anything at all of fellowship with the people of God in these things, and if you cannot go the full length of all that I have tried to say, if in some things you are walking with the people of God what a mercy it is!

Then John says, "And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with the His Son Jesus Christ". You see, if we are brought into fellowship thus with the people of God, we are brought into a measure of

fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. 'Ah', you say, 'it is great, too great a thought for me to entertain'. You may feel afraid to think of it, and yet it is so, if you are brought into any measure of fellowship with the Lord's people. "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ". For instance, in the matter of sin, when you are brought to feel about sin as Job felt about it, as Isaiah felt about it, as David felt about it, as the Apostle Paul felt about it, and as every child of God is made to feel about it, your thoughts about sin and about yourself as a sinner correspond to God's thoughts, as Quarles says in his wonderful poem, "Methinks I see my Father's image in the prisoner's eye", that is, in the eye of one who is thinking himself a sinner. Look at the publican; the image of God was to be seen in that man as he said "God be merciful to me the sinner". So when you are brought to see yourself as a sinner, to mourn over your sinnership and pronounce sentence upon yourself as a hell-deserving wretch, you have fellowship with the Father in that, you are entertaining the same sort of thoughts about sin as are in the heart of the Father. Then again, if you are led to entertain such thoughts of Jesus Christ as I have been speaking of, heart-attracting thoughts, esteeming Him precious, the one thing needful, seeing Him to be a most excellent One, your thoughts answer to the thoughts of the Father concerning His Son. "The Father dearly loves the Son and rates His merits high". God the Father is well-pleased with His dear Son; He is well satisfied with what His dear Son suffered and with the sacrifice He has offered; and as you are brought to view Christ thus, you have fellowship with the Father in your thoughts about Christ. "And with His Son Jesus Christ".

It is very great that a poor sinner should be brought into such fellowship, and you know, the root of it all is in that hymn that we have been singing, concerning the union of the people of God with the Lord Jesus Christ,

"Hail! sacred union, firm and strong!
How great the grace! how sweet the song!
That worms of earth should ever be
One with incarnate Deity!"

It all began from covenant union with Christ, an interest in His death. Fellowship with Him. If there is fellowship there must be love. You cannot really have fellowship with a person you do not love. You cannot have real communion with a person unless there is common ground between you, but if you are taught by the Spirit there will be common ground between you and Christ and you will be brought to Him as a sinner, and you will be enabled to plead with Him.

"With Him sweet converse I maintain,
Great as He is, I dare be free;
I tell Him all my griefs and pain,
And He reveals His love to me".

Fellowship with Christ. You come to Him with your sickness and your sore, with your sinfulness and your guilt, with the wretchedness you feel, with the temptations that press upon you, with the anxieties that weigh so heavily upon your heart. You come to Him with them all, and "He kindly listens while you tell the bitter pangs you feel within". This is fellowship with Christ, and then sometimes you receive into your heart by His goodness something of the benefit of His death, you "Feel the effects of Jesus' death by faith which works by love". and this is fellowship. Sometimes you enter into trial and temptation, you have to feel the weight of a cross, go forth to Him without the camp bearing His reproach. This is fellowship, fellowship with Him in suffering, as good Rutherford said, "We are the more sib to Christ that we suffer", that is, our relationship to Jesus Christ is made the more clearly manifest that we suffer for Him and with Him - fellowship with Him in His sufferings. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."

The time has gone and I must conclude, and I do not know that I can well conclude more fitly than with the apostolic benediction, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all, Amen".