

**“And this Gospel,”  
shall be preached...**

**Matthew 24:14**

**Sermon Summaries from Ministers of the Worldwide Church of God**

## **True Christian Fellowship**

By Robert Fahey

I was sitting at the main hotel in Lagos, Nigeria, with three of our African ministers. And I looked over and saw a group of Nigerian men dressed in their extremely colorful native garb. Each wore a long robe with baggy trousers embroidered in fancy colors and gold, shining in the sunlight, and a little pillbox hat. There were five of them sitting in a circle in the late afternoon after working hours, just talking and gesturing. They appeared to have known each other for years.

They displayed a very pleasant, beautiful kind of relationship.

Their companionship was striking. No one was left out. Everybody was a part of the group, everybody was accepted, everybody shared and everybody was enjoying it. I saw the courtesy they extended to each other. I saw the joy they shared at each other's comments, the laughter they had at various remarks. They really enjoyed each other. I saw a real brotherhood in those men.

I said to myself, “That's it! That is what is pleasing to God—this fellowship. That's what His plan is all about.”

### **God is a Fellowship**

John 1:1 goes back to the very earliest time we know of—before there was a heaven and earth, before there were any angels, before there were stars or a moon, before the sun shone. “In the

beginning was the Word, and the Word [the One who became Jesus Christ] was with God [the One who became the Father], and the Word was God.” These beings made up the God Family. There were the two, and nothing else—but fellowship.

They had a relationship that to our human minds is unbelievable. They were perfect in everything they did. They never tried to take from each other, were never selfish. There was always complete trust and confidence between them, complete open sharing. They had known each other forever.

“The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (verses 2-3). In God was life.

There was total cooperation. They had the same mind (such that later One was able to say, in effect, “If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father, because We look at the basic issues exactly alike”—see John 14:9). They were generous and all-wise.

But They were alone. So They wanted to add other beings, with whom to share the eternal life They had. Beings who would be like Them, with all the same characteristics. Perhaps—and here, admittedly, we may be extrapolating from the plan They put together—perhaps They were lonesome. So They wanted a community of people. They wanted diversity. They wanted different personalities and outlooks so They could have a fellowship

like that of those five men I saw in Nigeria.

They did not want other beings just there to take up space, or selfish beings who would foul the nest and fight and scream and say, "That's mine!" They wanted beings who would shun sin and exercise wisdom, beings equally as immortal as Themselves, who would always display respect for God as leader and for their fellow beings. They wanted to enjoy the other beings' viewpoints and feelings.

Look at how God pictures the world tomorrow—what He's looking forward to. I like the idea of the lion dwelling with the lamb and snakes that won't harm. In the world tomorrow the plowman will overtake the reaper. Families will be happy. People will grow up in an environment with no war.

But look at Zechariah 8:1-3: "Again the word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury. Thus saith the Lord; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem." God is going to dwell right smack in the middle of it. Why? "And Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the Lord of hosts the holy mountain. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age" (verses 3-4).

God is looking forward to a time when He will dwell in the middle of Jerusalem with people. People will be living, working and playing safely. You won't have to worry about somebody assaulting your children. "And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof" (verse 5). God likes the idea of a community of people, together and sharing.

### **The God Family**

When you realize what plan the Father and the Son were working out, you may find it interesting and instructive to think about what Christ's last Passover supper meant to Him. "And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him" (Luke 22:14).

Here was a beginning of His expanding Family—a beginning of the government for the time when all mankind would be members of the God Family. Christ was sitting at a dinner with men whose company He enjoyed, who had been with

Him as disciples three years. There had been only two Beings. Now there were to be more.

"And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (verse 15). Can we understand that more deeply than before?

Christ was eager. This was His final dinner as a human being before the plan went into effect. He was to be scourged, crucified and raised back to the God level. Then He would work with these men to bring other people into a "Church" through them. Then He would guide the Church as it announced that all the earth was eventually going to be encompassed in His fellowship.

"For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof [of the Passover—the communion or fellowship supper], until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (verse 16). Christ would again have fellowship with them then. He desired those men. He appreciated and loved every one.

He said so later on, and He told them, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). Christ told them their love for each other would show the world they were His disciples. Beings in that kind of relationship were the beings he wanted to dwell with Him forever.

Take a look at Revelation 19:5-7: "And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." The wife represents the people who are going to be a part of His Family in that enjoyable fellowship forever.

How does Christ celebrate this marriage? First He dresses His people royally: "And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb" (verses 8-9). He's also going to celebrate His reign with a banquet. It's a community rejoicing—as much as the fellowship of those five men in Nigeria, but much more.

Christ is eager for it. He says: "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God" (verse 9).

### Brotherly Love Versus Loneliness

The whole law God has given to mankind is based on love. Love is outgoing concern for other people, for their welfare, for their feelings. Love is the basis of true fellowship.

Love is social. If you are stuck on a desert island alone, you may have difficulty expressing love and outgoing concern. You will still be able to have love toward God, of course, but love is also between persons, between minds. It involves a joy of association and sharing.

The opposite of love is expressed in the life of a hermit who is fed up with everybody and wants nothing to do with people. Some people get so hurt and upset for various reasons—some their own fault and some not—that they get to the point where they just don't want communication. They say, in effect, "I only trust me." That's the opposite of what God wanted.

Loneliness is epidemic in our society. The farther we go from God's law, from love and companionship (God's law is called the law of love), the more lonesome people feel, regardless of the size of the crowd they're in. We've got wall-to-wall cities, and people are more lonely than ever.

When the real problem is, "I am lonely," people say instead, "Life is boring." Or: "I just feel unhappy. I don't know why, but I'm unhappy all the time." Or, "I've got a drinking problem," or, "I'm overweight." "I can't sleep." "I'm irritable." Unfulfilled would be the bottom line under all that. Authorities have identified other signs in lonely people. They brag a lot, talk about themselves or talk too much or too loud. They develop other outlets to try to satisfy their need for fellowship. Others become overly quiet, timid, seemingly fearful. But all these different cues signal one underlying problem—loneliness and discouragement. It's one of the most effective tools against God's people that Satan has.

Because people do not generally recognize what the real problem is, it's impossible for them to find the solution. They may have a lot of talk and pizzazz on the outside, but nevertheless they begin

to draw inward. Their thoughts become self-centered. Then, worse, they become addicted to props—chemicals sometimes, in the form of alcohol or drugs. Doctors now know that some chemically-addicted people are really lonely.

Some people become addicted to their work, their house, a hobby or a dog or cat. They get all wrapped up in nonhuman company because human company has become so distressing.

The real problems come after that. A constant anger can build up underneath—a constant frustration that keeps boiling, and the blood pressure begins to rise. Or anger disguises itself as depression and causes mental breakdowns, irrational behavior, physical illness, divorce, alcoholism, drug abuse or suicide.

Emotional psychologists say that loneliness is probably the number one problem of our age. It's interesting when you consider that God's plan offers the exact opposite. God's law and God's way lead totally away from that.

### A Treatment for Loneliness

Overcoming loneliness involves being able to look around and see those with whom you come in contact—perceiving their loneliness and fastening your mind there. A lonely person needs to focus on others—to express outgoing concern—instead of drawing inward and concentrating on himself. Most people will respond with friendship—the commodity they are dying for—if they are approached in the right way.

Doctors have found in group sessions that the loneliest people never nurture others. They never consider the other person's feelings. When others are speaking, they don't listen. They're self-obsessed. They insist on their share of time. The fact that the speaker might be at a great point of interest or covering some point that would be beneficial makes no difference to them. To solve this problem, these people need to learn to share.

The doctors suggest that these people develop a skill and share it with somebody—tennis, racquetball, swimming, sewing, playing cards, walking or some other hobby. The thing not to do is just sit down and say, "Help me, I'm lonely." If you do that, you're asking for a babysitter. You should go out and do something—share, participate.

A friend of mine has known a certain elderly

gentleman for a long time, and he regards this old man as very wise. Once he asked the old fellow, "Tell me, in my lifetime, how many really close friends can I expect to have?" The man told him, "Well, if you're lucky, as many as you have fingers on one hand." It's a rare thing to have a really close friend. But if you're able to be one, then you're going to have far more than usual.

I Corinthians 13 describes love, an outgoing concern for others. Learn to nurture others. That's biblical love, serving others. It is exactly what God wants. It is the essence of keeping His commandments-- showing love toward God and also toward every fellow human.

Close families talk and share outings and sports. There's never a lonesome person in the middle of a close family. Everybody feels accepted. As Malachi says, we should turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers (Mal. 4:6). In principle, that includes aunts, uncles, sisters, brothers and cousins—and even neighbors, in the broadest sense of the term. When is the last time your family had a reunion?

### Help For Problems

In my Ambassador College days all the guys in the dormitory and all the friends I knew had problems. They would share them with me a little bit, and I'd start praying about every one of those problems. That can take an awful long time, just one after the other. I wouldn't bring up one of mine. But before I knew it, my problems seemed somehow more manageable.

God made us so that one of our greatest needs is to be understood and be able to share in an open way. We all have deep problems, apprehensions, hopes and dreams. But it helps to have another human being you love, have affection for and admire to talk to you or listen.

Job's three friends came to him and sat there seven days. They were grief-stricken by what had happened to the man—his family and possessions were wiped out and he was covered with boils from head to foot. For seven days they never said a word. That was good. But then they made one mistake. They began to talk to him, tell him his problems and preach at him. And that was the last thing the man needed. Then he thought, "My friends are against me as well." His wife had given him the

discouraging advice, "Curse God and die." All together it put poor Job right at the bottom. Be careful how you share.

In this world, when you're lonely, the solution isn't to go hunting for some human friends who will solve your problem. But there is one Being who is always available—who's always a friend you can go to. That's God the Father. Take a look at Psalm 73:23-25:

"Nevertheless I [David, or any one of us] am continually with thee [God]: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory [God will welcome you into His Family]. Whom have I in heaven but thee?" There was nobody else David could share with, deal with, trust.

"And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever [God is the One who strengthens you]. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish [God's purpose was to bring them close to Him and give them life. As Christ said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). And those who remain far from Him are going to perish.]: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works" (verses 25-28).

If that's your outlook, as it was David's, other children of the Father who share that relationship with God are going to be very close to you. You're going to appreciate them more and more. Paul wrote of "preferring" the brethren, just because they're brethren (Rom. 12:10). People not acquainted with God's true Church don't have this fellowship, and may run into enormous problems. They're just totally alone in a society where nobody is their friend.

We need fellowship. In the Church of God, we have the Father first, the Son and then all the sons and daughters. We have fellowship among us. Don't be separate, off by yourself. Be part of the Body that's growing and readying itself to be brought into the Kingdom of God, to share eternity with God and live with Him forever.

If you're part of that Body, let everybody know by your presence.