

Friendship with God

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Date: 06 May 2012

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[0 : 00] Is God your friend? Is it even possible to enjoy friendship with God? We can believe in God.

We can perhaps even trust in God. We can serve God. But friendship with God? The Bible does not shy away from the language of friendship in describing how God relates to His people.

Our father Abraham, to give just one example, is described as God's friend. So given that it is possible to enjoy friendship with God, is that something that you would like to experience?

And to cultivate? But what about God? We may wish to be God's friend, but does God want to be our friend?

We may wish to enjoy friendship and fellowship with God, but is it conceivable that God, the one who eternally lacks nothing, would wish to enjoy friendship and fellowship with us?

[1 : 18] This morning I want to engage, and I want us all to engage in what might be described as a ludicrously ambitious episode of time travel, as we explore this matter of friendship and fellowship with God.

What we will do is travel back in time to the very beginning, and the creation of our first parents, Adam and Eve, and life in the Garden of Eden. And not content with traveling back in time, we will then travel in the opposite direction, to the end of this world as we know it, and to the new heaven and the new earth, the new Jerusalem, as it's described for us by John in the 21st chapter of Revelation.

Finally, if we're not too busy to continue, we will then return to the present, to Aberdeen, on the 7th of May, no, 6th of May, 2012, today.

So backwards to Eden, forward to the new Jerusalem, then back again to Aberdeen. And at each stop, concerned with this matter of friendship and fellowship with God.

So come with me to Eden to witness a most remarkable occurrence as the sun goes down and a cool breeze rustles the leaves in the garden.

[2 : 54] Let's read what we have recorded for us in Genesis chapter 3 and verses 8 and 9. Genesis chapter 3, reading verses 8 and 9.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

But the Lord God called to the man, Where are you? The Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.

Can we even begin to picture this scene? The creator of the universe, the eternal God, the one of whom King Solomon declared, The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you, walking in the garden.

Well, can we picture such a scene? We cannot. And this morning I don't want us to try, or even to begin to ponder on how this picture is to be conceived.

[4 : 12] But what we can do is draw from the picture truths that relate to our concern this morning, friendship and fellowship with God.

God created all, and He created planet Earth and the Garden of Eden in particular, as a home for Adam and Eve. The garden was not God's home, and yet here, in the cool of the day, God is in the garden.

Was this the first time He had walked in the garden? Has He come on this day for the first time on account of the tragic event that has just occurred that we will comment on in a moment?

Surely not. The picture painted, at the very least, suggests that God was a regular visitor to the garden. And why was this so?

What was the purpose of His visits? Well, He came to enjoy friendship and fellowship with Adam and Eve. God created Adam and Eve in such a way that friendship and fellowship was possible.

[5 : 28] God created them in His own image and likeness. As we read in the first chapter of Genesis and in verse 26, then God said, Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.

Now, this is a statement pregnant with meaning, but it certainly includes man's capacity to know God and to enjoy a relationship with Him.

The Bible makes it very clear that men and women were designed for friendship with God. This is what we have been created for, to know God, to love God, to experience friendship with God, to enjoy God.

This is, as the Westminster divine so eloquently and beautifully expressed it, man's chief end. If we only know one catechism, well, that's the one we know.

What is man's chief end? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever, to enjoy Him forever, to enjoy a relationship of friendship with God.

[6 : 47] But notice what is more remarkable in many ways, that this enjoyment is not one-sided. It is not only that we are to enjoy God, but that God is to enjoy us.

At the very dawn of time, in the pristine perfection of Eden, God would walk in the garden, but He would not walk alone.

He would walk with those He had created in His own image and likeness. With Adam and Eve, He would walk and He would talk. And what delightful conversations those must have been.

So at the very beginning, it is clear that friendship with God lies at the very heart of God's own purposes for us, men and women. But if this is so, why is such friendship so seldom enjoyed?

Why is it that men and women today seem rather to be enemies of God and not His friends? Well, the very verses that we have read in Genesis provide the answer to that question, or point certainly to the answer to that question.

[8 : 02] As God walks in the garden on this particular day that we have read Him, He does walk alone. No Adam, no Eve.

And so He asks the question, Where are you? Where are you? You're not here today. Where are you, Adam? Where are you, Eve?

I've come to fellowship with you. I've come to talk with you. But where are you? Of course, we know what has happened. Adam and Eve have sinned.

They have disobeyed God. They have rebelled against Him and trodden underfoot His friendship and trust. And so they now hide among the very trees whose leaves rustle in the wind in the cool of the day.

In response to the question that summons them, they appear heads bowed in guilt and shame. And what is the consequence of their disobedience?

[9 : 09] Well, where to start? This morning we limit ourselves to one declared consequence that is recorded for us at the end of chapter 3 of Genesis in verse 23.

So the Lord God banished Him from the Garden of Eden. No longer would Adam and Eve walk with God in the Garden.

No longer would they enjoy those hours of fellowship in the cool of the day. And no longer would God enjoy that friendship and fellowship with Adam and Eve in the manner He had enjoyed it in the garden.

So God's purpose in creating men and women involves the relationship of friendship to be enjoyed with those He created in His image and likeness.

But tragically, man's rebellion serves to drive a wedge in that friendship. And estrangement becomes man's experience, estranged and separated from God and from friendship and fellowship with Him.

[10 : 25] But now it's time to travel into the future, to the new heaven and the new earth, to the new Jerusalem, to that new dwelling place for God's people that will be revealed when Jesus returns.

In the beginning, God provided a garden. And that day He will provide a city. Let's read what is said concerning that new Jerusalem in Revelation chapter 21 and verses 1 to 4.

Revelation chapter 21 verses 1 to 4 at the very end of the Bible, page 1249. And there we read, Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Now the dwelling of God is with men and He will live with them. They will be His people and God Himself will be with them and be their God.

[11 : 38] He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

The picture is a stunningly beautiful one and one where our interest is often concentrated on those things that will be absent from the new Jerusalem.

Every tear will be wiped away, no more death or mourning or crying or pain, no more stomach cramps or burst appendixes, no more drips or antibiotics or painkillers, no more morphine or even paracetamol, no more tubes, no more tubes in heaven, no more tubes in the new Jerusalem.

But much more wonderful than that will be that which is present rather than that which is absent. And what will be present or rather the one who will be present is made very clear for us in this vision that John has and records for us.

Now the dwelling of God is with men. This is the heart of the matter. This is the glory of the new Jerusalem. This is the chief delight of the citizens of the new Jerusalem.

[13 : 03] God will live with us. Notice how this truth is expressed time and again even in these few words but especially in verse 3.

Now the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.

But of course the delight of God dwelling with us is delight not only on our part as we've already suggested at the beginning.

God will delight in living with us. It will be God's delight to enjoy that friendship and fellowship with his people that he created us for. No longer banished.

No longer separated. No longer estranged. No longer enemies. Friends with God. And unlike Eden God will not only visit us he will live with us.

[14 : 08] What a glorious future. What a profound privilege and joy to be able to declare with Paul that our citizenship is in heaven. Do you look forward to this day that is approaching with Peter can you say we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth the home of righteousness.

Yes even the home of the righteous one. So let's recap. We traveled back in time to Eden the dwelling place provided by God for his people in the beginning and discovered that it was a place where Adam and Eve enjoyed friendship and fellowship with God.

This was God's purpose and intent and delight but tragically this fellowship was lost as Adam and Eve were banished from God's near presence.

So in looking back we are left to lament that which was lost. But then we traveled into the future to the much happier scene in the new Jerusalem of God dwelling with his people.

Friendship and fellowship are restored and of a depth and quality that surpasses even Eden. So is that it?

[15 : 34] Can we only look back and lament or look forward and wait? Is that all we can do? What about now? What about today?

We are not in Eden and we are not yet in the new Jerusalem. We are in Aberdeen today. Cold and gray though not so cold today.

Sometimes a little miserable. What about here today in Aberdeen? Is friendship with God a possibility for us today?

Let's turn to our final verse that we want to look at this morning. And we will remain in Revelation and turn to the passage that we read earlier in the service in Revelation chapter 3 and verses 8 and 9 within the letter to the church in Laodicea.

We find these words in Revelation chapter 3 verses 20. Here I am. I stand at the door and knock.

[16 : 48] If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in and eat with him and he with me. Here I am.

Who is the one who speaks? Well it's clear that it is Jesus who is speaking. In the following verse he speaks of his father on his throne.

So Jesus declares and announces himself with these words here I am. Today not in the past not in the future but today here I am.

And who is this Jesus? The eternal son of God the one granted by the father the mission of reconciling estranged men and women with God of doing that which was needful to restore lost friendship and lost fellowship.

The barrier to friendship or the cause of his estrangement is man's sin beginning beginning with Adam's sin but including the sin of each and every one of us.

[17 : 55] And Jesus removed that barrier. He dealt with our sin by his death on the cross and there he bore the sin of the world. He received the just punishment our sin deserved.

When Jesus died on the cross the curtain in the temple in Jerusalem that guarded the Holy of Holies as a symbolic declaration of man's estrangement from the presence of God was torn in two from top to bottom.

Mission accomplished. And it is this same Jesus who speaks these words today who this morning announces here I am here I am and what has he got to say?

What does Jesus want? Well he wants to come in and eat with us. The picture is unmistakably a picture of friendship and fellowship.

I will come in and eat with him and he with me. The picture is of friends sharing a meal together of enjoying fellowship and conversation one with another.

[19 : 08] This is what Jesus wants. This is what Jesus wants now. This is what he wants with you. In the original context the words are addressed to believers in the church at Laodicea.

As we have read, lukewarm believers but believers for all that. And to his own people Jesus expresses his desire for friendship and fellowship.

and the invitation he extends. It is an urgent and an immediate one. Here I am. Here I am. Listen to me now.

Here I am. Listen to what I desire. Listen to what it is that I am proposing to you. Listen now. His invitation is personal.

Not directed only to the mass of his people but rather to each and every one. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door. So this morning it doesn't matter if the one seated next to you will open the door.

[20 : 12] If the one behind you or in front of you opens the door. That is not your primary concern. If anyone opens the door. If you would open the door. The invitation is a personal invitation.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in and eat with him and he with me. And the invitation is persistent.

He knocks on the door and he knocks on the door and he continues to knock on the door. And what will you do? Do you want to open the door?

Do you want to enjoy sweet friendship and fellowship with Jesus today? Perhaps you are a believer and you have grown cold and lukewarm much like the saints in Laodicea.

Well he is knocking on the door as a permanent expression of his desire to eat with you and you with him.

[21 : 16] Perhaps for you the issue is not of a friendship that has grown cold but of a friendship that has yet to begin. And to you also the invitation is extended.

How will you respond? Will you open the door? Will you put your trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord and begin to enjoy the friendship that you have been created to experience and enjoy?

This coming weekend we will participate in the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Supper provides an opportunity to sup with the Lord, to commune with God and God's people, to enjoy friendship and fellowship with God?

Will you be there? Will you be there? Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me.

The invitation is extended today. We're not in Eden lamenting what went wrong. We're not in the new Jerusalem awaiting what will come.

[22 : 26] We are here today and today the invitation is extended. Here I am. We've traveled to the dawn of time.

We've been catapulted into the distant future, but what remains for you to do is a simpler task. It is to answer the door. To answer the door.

Let us pray. Amen. Amen.