In the Midst — The Glory of His Name and the Mystery of Christ

Ministry · July 6, 2019

Matthew 18:20 — The Place of Honor

Matthew 18:20 is one of the most familiar verses in the New Testament: For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. What is on my heart is the place itself — the midst — and who occupies it.

The midst is a place of honor, a distinguished and central place. And in the Scriptures it belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ. When He took a little child and set him in the midst of the disciples, it was not only the child who was in the midst — the Lord Jesus was there, holding him. The lesson was about childlike dependence and faith; but the one giving that lesson occupied the place of honor, with the child in his arms. That is the place He holds.

To say that the Lord Jesus is in the midst of two or three gathered to his name is to say something about glory. Glory, in its biblical sense, is whatever character or quality appropriately calls forth honor and reverence. The Lord Jesus is in the midst — that is his place of glory. And it belongs to him.

Sunago — The Word That Matters

To understand this verse more precisely, it helps to look at the Greek word behind gathered together in my name. The word is sunago — two parts: sun, meaning together, and ago, meaning to lead. It is the word of drawing, of leading together, of attraction. It is the word from which we get synagogue.

Matthew 13 contains the parable of the tares and wheat. The farmer's servants are told at harvest to gather the tares first and bind them in bundles for burning — but the word used for that gathering is different, a word meaning to lay together, to pile up. The tares are not drawn anywhere; they are simply laid side by side and tied up. The wheat, however, is gathered into the barn with a different word — and that second word is sunago, the same word as Matthew 18:20.

The distinction matters. There is in Christendom an immense amount of Christian profession. People who have learned the right answers, who know the vocabulary, who can identify themselves as Christians and behave outwardly like Christians. That is the tares — laid together, looking indistinguishable from wheat, producing nothing real. The gathering of Matthew 18:20 is something else entirely: a drawing, a leading together, an attraction that has a source outside the people themselves. Where two or three are thus drawn — by the Holy Spirit, to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ — there he is in the midst.

> *For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. — Matthew 18:20*

Six Gatherings That Are Not This One

Working through the concordance under the word gather in the New Testament reveals how many different Greek words are translated by that single English term — and how different they are from sunago. Luke 12:1 describes an innumerable multitude gathered together, so large that they trod on one another. The Greek word means gathered upon — gathered on top of each other's feet. That is not the gathering of Matthew 18:20. The Lord Jesus was explicit about the smallness of the company he had in mind: not two or three thousand, but two or three.

Acts 16:9 speaks of Paul assuredly gathering that the Lord had called him to preach the gospel in Macedonia. The word there means to drive together — a

conclusion driven home like a nail, an inward conviction. Nothing to do with assembling. First Corinthians 16:2 speaks of gatherings — of money, contributions, a collection for the saints. Also not the word. Luke 24:33 describes the eleven gathered together in Jerusalem after the resurrection — but the word there means huddled together, pulled in like a miser's coins, a spontaneous clustering of frightened disciples. The Lord was not yet in the midst of that gathering. Not until verse 36 — Jesus himself stood in the midst of them — does the picture of Matthew 18:20 appear.

Each of these is a genuine gathering of some kind. None of them is what the Lord meant when he said where two or three are gathered together in my name. The drawing of sunago — the Holy Spirit leading souls to the name of Christ alone, so that he himself takes the central place — is something distinct and specific.

God All in All — and the Son in the Midst

First Corinthians 15:23–28 contains one of the most searching and glorious passages in Paul's writings. He describes the end of all God's purposes: Christ the firstfruits, then those who are his at his coming, then the end, when he delivers up the kingdom to God the Father, when all enemies have been put under his feet and the last enemy, death, has been destroyed. And then verse 28: when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

Does this mean the Son is inferior to the Father in that final state? Not at all. The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are one God. If God is all in all, and the Son is God, then the Son is in the all. But notice where this passage places him: everything is put under his feet, and he is subject to the one above him. That places him exactly in the midst — all things beneath him, the Father above him, himself the center of the eternal order. The place of the midst — the place of honor — belongs to him forever.

Ephesians — The Mystery of Christ and What God Is Administering

Ephesians 1:3 declares that God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ. Not some blessings, not future blessings — all spiritual blessings, in the heavenly places, and in Christ. Verses 9–10 reveal the purpose behind it: that in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in him. There is that word again — gathered together in one, the same family of words, everything ultimately drawn to Christ as center.

Ephesians 3 unfolds what Paul calls the mystery of Christ. A mystery in Scripture is not a puzzle without a solution — it is something God was holding, something he could not reveal until the right moment. He held it through all the ages of the Old Testament, through the prophets, through the law. He could not reveal it until the Lord Jesus went to the cross, died alone, rose again, and the Spirit came down to form the body of Christ. Then the mystery could be declared.

The mystery is this: the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Not just that Gentiles could be saved — that was known. But that believing Jews and believing Gentiles should be formed into one body, with the head in heaven and the body on earth, linked by the Holy Spirit, one new man in Christ. The administration of this mystery is what God is carrying out now in the world.

> *To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known through the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. — Ephesians 3:10–11*

This is the most important thing happening in the world. More important than any political development, any scientific advance, any cultural shift. God is administering, through the body of Christ — through every saved soul — a

display of his manifold wisdom to principalities and powers in the heavenly places. The church is the instrument of that display. And the church is one: one body, one head in heaven, formed by one Spirit, indwelt by one Spirit, linked to the head by one Spirit. When two or three are gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone — without any human addition, without anything that draws from their flesh — he is in the midst. And that is the local expression of the one body. That is the mystery of Christ displayed.

We are in Christ. We are seated with him in the heavenly places — not eventually, but now. God the Father who is also our Father has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in him. He chose us in him before the foundation of the world. This is what He has for us now. May He give us grace to lay hold of it, to walk in the consciousness of it, and to honor the one who is in the midst with the glory that is his due.

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