In What Name Are We Gathered Together?

Peace and Communion · Matthew 18:20

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> *Where two or three are gathered together in {unto} my name, there am I in the midst of them (Matt. 18:20).*

This is the only place in Scripture where these precious words are found. The Lord was speaking of the Church, or Assembly. Matthew's gospel is the only one which mentions the Church. The reason is obvious. Matthew's line of truth treats of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham. This is why His title to the throne, birth in Bethlehem, and some other testimonies of the prophets, are exclusively found there; and why the sermon on the mount, parables of the kingdom, and the prophecies as to the future of the Jews, Christendom, and Gentiles, are here so fully given. In a word, Matthew's gospel sets forth in detail that Jesus came unto His own {John 1:11},

gave continual proofs of His Messiahship, and was there able to bring in the kingdom; but His own [the Jews] received Him not {John 1:11}.

Instead of the nation welcoming Him, only a few fishermen and women, and some others, received Him as the Messiah; they were thus on kingdom ground, and partakers of His blessing. The people held a council to destroy Him, so that He eventually gave them up as a wicked and adulterous generation (Matt. 12:14, 45; 16:4).

Such being the case, it seemed a fitting time for our Lord to bring out what had been kept secret since the world began {Rom. 16:25},

that He purposed to bring in another order of blessing, quite distinct from Judaism -- His Church. He said therefore to Peter, Upon this rock I will

(not I have built, or I do build, but I will) build my Church {Matt. 16:18}.

What the Church or Assembly was, is not revealed till Paul's apostleship (Eph. 3:5); only, on giving up the Jews for a time as a people under the governmental dealings of God, He would do another thing -I will build my Church (Matt. 16:18).

Whatever types and shadows of the Church there may have been in the Old Testament, this is the first time in Scripture that it is plainly spoken of. Afterward, in the eighteenth chapter, when speaking of one brother having trespassed against another, He again mentions the Church, or Assembly, as being in the place here, not of infallibility, but of authority as to discipline. In this the Lord clearly teaches that the power of all authority in the discipline of erring ones here, as well as also the secret of success in united prayer, is His being in the midst of them. For where two or three are gathered together in {unto} my name, there am I in the midst of them (Matt. 18:15-20).

It is important to observe, though these words are only found here, that there is a remarkable allusion to them in reference to a case of assembly discipline at Corinth -In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, &c. (1 Cor. 5:4).

Perhaps few passages of Scripture are more frequently quoted throughout Christendom than the verse we are now considering, though apparently by many little understood. It is often misquoted. We have heard it said, “Where two or three are met together in my name,” but it is not Scripture; and it is sometimes added, as if it were part of the verse, “and that to bless them.” Again, referring to this verse, one has said, “We meet in the name of Jesus”; another, “We meet simply in the name of Jesus”; or, “The name of Jesus is sufficient for our meeting”; but neither of them are Scriptural statements. Jesus said, My name.

The question therefore is, “What is now His name?” Some also begin a letter with “Dear brother in Jesus,” and end it with “Yours in Jesus.” And though we do not doubt that such mean well, yet a moment’s reflection on the truth of Holy Scripture would show that we were not in Him in the days of His flesh, but are in Him risen and ascended; and, by the gift of the Holy Ghost, we are united to Him there who has been made both Lord and Christ. We never read therefore in Scripture of our being in Jesus, but in Christ Jesus,

or complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power {see Col. 2:10}.

We do read of them which sleep in Jesus, but it should be through Jesus {1 Thess. 4:14, see New Trans., JND}.

It is a point of great importance to souls as to whether their thoughts are continually revolving on Jesus as He was on earth, (most blessed in its place,) or occupied with Christ Himself glorified, our life and righteousness, and in whom we are, through marvelous grace, accepted and blessed. Instead therefore of its being said met together in my name, our Lord said, gathered together in my name {Matt. 18:20}.

For us to meet together implies the activity of our wills; to be gathered together

implies the putting forth of another power, a Gatherer; and so it is. The Holy Ghost on earth, during our Lord’s absence, draws us unto His name, giving us the sense and enjoyment of being around Him who is in the midst. It is not a voluntary

association of men, but a distinct action of the Holy Ghost drawing our hearts to that most precious name, to which the new life we have received delights to come, under the guidance of the Spirit, and the word of truth. How solemn, and yet how unspeakably blessed it is, thus to have the consciousness of being gathered together

by the Spirit of God! But while this action of the Holy Ghost in gathering together would include those who are in Christ, it necessarily excludes all who are not in Christ; for how could they be truly gathered together in His name in whom they have not believed? What an untrue thing it would be! How this one Scripture demolishes every idea of mere human confederacies and associations for the Lord’s

work! Surely the Holy Ghost is the Testifier and Glorifier of the Lord Jesus during His absence, and thus, to those who know Him, His name is as ointment poured forth {see S of S 1:3}.

Jesus said, Where two or three are gathered together in {unto} my name {Matt. 18:20}.

The question for every heart is, Are we gathered together in His name? for this surely excludes every other name. How solemnly and sternly did the Holy Ghost, by the apostle, rebuke the first sound of one believer saying, I am of Paul,

and another, I of Apollos!

He appeals at once to them as members of the body of Christ, and asks, Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Cor. 1:12, 13).

It was not that they purposed to give up meeting in the name of the Lord Jesus, but only to adopt their names, perhaps as a mark of respect to Paul and Apollos. This, however, is decidedly resented, and declared to be carnal, and not spiritual. Some might not have apprehended the satisfying and absorbing value of being gathered unto His name, and others might have lost the freshness of it. It is difficult to know how any Christians, who have tasted the comfort and power of being gathered together unto His name, could tolerate the substitution or addition of another name. Did we not know that schism, or sectarianism, is a work of the flesh, we should have thought it impossible. Alas! what is man? When the Lord mentioned His Church or Assembly, He was referring to what was future, well knowing what would take place as to His death, resurrection, and the descent of the Holy Ghost. Immediately after saying, I will build my Church, &c.,

it is said, From that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day (Matt. 16:21).

It is said

from that time forth,

because the Church could only be founded upon His death and resurrection, and formed by the descent of the Holy Ghost after His exaltation to the right hand of God. This change in the calling, standing, and essential characteristics of the Church of God, as contrasted with Israel, is why the place of worship, whether Jerusalem or any other place, is no longer the question, but whether we are gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. It must have appeared strange to Jews to have heard the Lord thus speaking of His own name as the center of gathering. They might have thought, “Why such silence about the gorgeous temple, and all its imposing ceremonials? Why is all this passed by?” Little did they imagine that their beautiful temple was so soon to become a heap of ruins, and a desolation. His own {John 1:11}

nation having rejected Him, His own

would thenceforward be those few who had received Him {Luke 10:38, 19:6};

and the beautiful house of God on earth being desolate for Judah's sin, the Father's house {John 14:2}

would be that which would henceforth engage their hearts. Everything is thus changed. Instead, therefore, of being gathered together in the place of goodly stones, as God's house on earth, a spiritual order of things has supplanted the worldly sanctuary; so that now those who are truly gathered according to the Lord's mind are gathered together in (or to) His name. What are we to understand by my name?

For now He has a name above every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. His name is now no longer Jesus only {John 12:9};

for Peter said to the Jews, God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

This is why, in 1 Cor. 5., it is not, as we have sometimes heard, "gathered in the name of Jesus," but in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ {1 Cor. 5:4}.

The difference is of immense consequence to souls; for those who speak of "meeting in the name of Jesus" have Christ as He was on earth before them, and are like His disciples on earth, who were really on kingdom ground, which is not where the truth has put us. The being gathered together in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ connects our hearts with Christ in glory, where He now is, and now only is known; and there we may be sure the Holy Ghost, the Glorifier of Christ, directs us. Judaism having been laid aside for a time, this new order of things, formed by the coming of the Holy Ghost, and

energized by His indwelling power, is brought in; so that now the name of the Lord Jesus is to be associated with everything. We are gathered together in His name; to ask the Father in prayer in His name. Whatsoever we do in word or deed, is all to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus. The apostles wrought their miracles in His name; and by-and-by, at the name of Jesus every knee in heaven, in earth, and under the earth, shall bow, and to Him every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (John 16:23; Col. 3:17; Phil. 2:10, 11). We have dwelt a little on being gathered together in {unto} His name, because, of the careless way in which many seem to regard these words of our blessed Lord; and because we judge it necessary that their true meaning should be apprehended, if we would really enter into what follows, There am I in the midst of them {Matt. 18:20}.

It is only when truly gathered in His name, that we are really able to count upon His presence. His being in the midst

is something special. It is more easily realized than expressed. The eye of faith discerns Him; the unbelieving see Him not. His being in the midst

of a company so gathered must not be confounded with the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. All who have the Spirit -- the other Comforter -- have Him for ever. He shall abide with you for ever {see John 14:16}.

He is always dwelling in us individually, and in the Church on earth, even when not assembled together. It is a mistake, then, to suppose that the Holy Ghost is only present when gathered together in the Lord's name. No doubt He is there, and the power of all ministry and worship. But there am I in the midst of them

is a conditional fact, and not the Lord (as some have said) present by the Holy Spirit, but the Lord in the midst in spirit, though personally seated on the Father's throne. It is most happy to enjoy His presence thus. Is there anything of a collective character at all comparable to it on earth? Is it not the most heavenly kind of collective blessing that we can know on earth? In order to our being gathered together in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the full enjoyment of His presence in the midst,

we must know Him -(1) as the One who has accomplished our eternal redemption; (2) as the One who has sent down the Holy Ghost; (3) as the One who is the Head of the body -- one body; (4) as the One who is walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks, to whom we are individually and corporately accountable; (5) as the One who is soon coming to receive us to

Himself. There are other aspects of our Lord which night be added to this list; but those would be recognized by such as are in any measure settled in the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ. 1. What liberty of soul the knowledge of His being in the midst gives us, who loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood! Those who look at such gatherings as a means of grace in order to obtain salvation, are wholly wide of the Lord's mind. Knowing that we have redemption in Christ and through His blood, we joyfully remember Him who redeemed us at such a cost; and being assured we are children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, and having received the Spirit of adoption, we worship the Father in spirit and in truth {John 4:23}.

We remember that Jesus was for us on the cross, we see that He is for us in the glory, and we look for His coming again, when we shall ever be with the Lord {1 Thess. 4:17}.

How is it possible that unbelievers could share in this, however amiable they may be? Scripture rather contemplates an unbeliever {1 Cor. 14:24}

coming into such an assembly, and being so struck at what he saw and heard, as to fall down and declare that God is in you of a truth {see 1 Cor. 14:25}.

This we know has sometimes been the happy testimony of such. 2. The One who said, There am I in the midst of them {Matt. 18:20},

has sent down the Holy Ghost. Before He left the world Jesus said, When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, &c. (John 15:26),

thus promising to send the Holy Ghost; and in Acts 2 we read, Jesus therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear (Acts 2:33).

The Holy Ghost, then, has been sent down from heaven {1 Pet. 1:12},

consequent upon the finished work of Jesus, and, as we have seen, is to abide with us for ever. This is not merely a spiritual influence, or an emanation from God, but the Holy Ghost Himself, who is one with the Father and the Son. We are builded together (not gathered together, but builded together) for an habitation of God through the Spirit. God is, therefore, dwelling in His people on earth. Individually, He dwells in our bodies, and has been sent into our hearts; collectively, the Church is the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16, 6:19; Gal. 4:6).

What a wonderful fact, that a divine Person dwells in us! God's presence, therefore, being with us, what gravity, what obligations as to holiness, and what devotedness, are necessarily involved! How is it possible that any could be truly gathered together in the Lord's name, who are not conscious of being cleansed from their sins by His blood, and, consequently, being the present abode of the Holy Ghost on earth? 3. The One who is in our midst is the Head of the body -- the Assembly. As risen and ascended, He is seated at the right hand of God, who gave Him to be Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who filleth all in all (Eph. 1:20-23).

How can we, then, be rightly thinking of Him now as in the midst, without holding the Head {Col. 2:19}?

This was the cause of so much failure with the Colossian saints. The apostle referred to some who were vainly puffed up in their fleshly mind, and not holding the Head, from whom all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God (see Col. 2:18, 19).

Thus the One who is in our midst draws out our hearts, while adoringly occupied with Himself, towards every member of His body on earth, and makes us sensible of our own place of privilege and service as members of the one body {Rom. 12:4, 5},

and of one another. Thus holding the Head {Col. 2:19},

each member of His body becomes an object of our interest and love. Every circle narrower than this is refused by the faithful as sectarian, and every circle larger than this plainly bears to them the character of a mere human association and confederacy. To such also the loud boast of usefulness fails to dislodge the heart from fidelity to Him who is in the midst of those thus gathered to His name. So weighty is this in the light of Scripture, that the one loaf

on the Lord's table is the standing witness of the one body. For we being many are one bread [loaf], and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread [loaf] (1 Cor. 10:17);

and elsewhere all saints are enjoined to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness, and meekness, and long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit (Eph. 4:1-4).

We find, too, that our Lord, in His commendatory prayer to the Father just before going to the cross, earnestly desired that all who should believe on Him through His disciples' word might manifest unity. He said,

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:20, 21).

Above all, we know that one object of the Savior's death was, that He might gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad (John 11:52).

Thus the prayer of Jesus, His death on the cross, the place of headship given to Him in ascension, the action of the Holy Ghost sent down to baptize all believers into one body, and His operation in us for keeping the Spirit's unity in the bond of peace, all show that the One who is in the midst {Matt. 18:20}

of those gathered together in His name, has the highest interest in our practical acknowledgment of one body

and one Spirit {1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:4}.

How else could we be intelligently gathered around Him who is the Head

of this one body {Col. 1:18}?

Is not, then, the abandonment of the name of the Lord Jesus {Col. 3:17},

as the only center of gathering, for that of an ecclesiastical building, the very rejection of Christian ground for the adoption of a Jewish order of things? How dear to the heart of Jesus, and how precious to Him the relationship of those must be, who are spoken of by the Holy Ghost as members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones {Eph. 5:30}!

Need it be added, that there is no other membership recognized in the teaching of the apostles? "One Spirit with the Lord; The Father's smile of love Rests ever on the members here, As on the Head above."

4. If the Lord is thus known as in the midst {Matt. 18:20},

and the power of the abiding Spirit duly regarded, how could there be in those so gathered the absence of dependence, reverence, and the consciousness of being under divine guidance? Who, if summoned by the Queen to a favored audience, would dare to prescribe what should be done during the honored interview? And could we render less homage to Him who is in the midst

were our souls in the realization of this gracious fact? Impossible that there could be room for any human order of arrangement in such a presence. Nothing is more clearly revealed than that He, as Son over His own house, the One whom John saw

in the midst of the seven candlesticks {Rev. 2:1; see Rev. 1:12-18},

holds us accountable to Him in a corporate as well as in an individual capacity. Almost all the epistles, but especially the second and third chapters of Revelation, show this. To those gathered together in His name He looks for conduct suited to Himself; and that prayer, worship, ministry of the Word, or whatever takes place, shall be according to His mind, and in the power of the Holy Ghost,

who divideth to every man severally as He will {1 Cor. 12:11}. (Read 1 Cor. 12.)

There is no room here for fleshly wisdom. Man in the flesh is not recognized; only saints in Christ. The first is entirely unknown here. This marks the holiness of the ground, as well as its dignity. Had we a truer, deeper sense of the Holy Ghost dwelling in us, of the Lord Jesus in our midst, and of our being a new creation in Him -- members of His body, what reverence, what felt weakness and utter helplessness in ourselves would there be; and what power of the Holy Ghost would be realized, while He takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us! Whether it be a question of personal conduct, or of edification, or of discipline, the one thought of paramount importance must be as to what suits Him -the holy and the true {see Rev. 3:7}

-- who is in our midst. If, in dealing with others, both as to binding and losing, we have His mind, how can it be otherwise than the fulfilment of His word, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven {Matt. 18:18}.

This, our Lord's wonderful way of ratifying in heaven what is thus done on earth according to His will, not only brings us into very close association with Himself, but cannot fail to invest us with a most solemn sense of the holiness of the ground on earth, on which He has graciously set us during His absence. May the Lord give us all a deeper sense of His own mind in all these things! 5. That He is coming again must ever be the recurring thought and expectation of those who are consciously gathered together in His name. His thrice-repeated, I come quickly {Rev. 22:7, 12, 20},

in the last page of inspiration, must make us sensible of the possibility that each time of being so gathered on earth may be the last, or that our gathering together unto Him at His coming may take place the next moment. When Jesus presents Himself as the Bright and Morning Star {Rev. 22:16},

we know that the Spirit and the Bride say, Come {Rev. 22:17}!

These are only a few of the many lines of instruction which we believe are comprehended in our Lord's words, Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them {Matt. 18:20}.

They are of growing importance, because of the bold and appalling way in which Christendom is appending His precious name to accredit most unscriptural doctrines and proceedings. Some who hold and propagate the most blasphemous doctrines of the day claim the place and name of Christians; and the modern Phariseeism, and revival of Jewish doctrines, are professedly associated with Christ and Christianity. Those who are spiritual, and are kept in the love of God, will perceive in this brief Scripture there is not the least recognition of man in the flesh; the all-attractive Object is Christ. There am I in the midst of them

is all that is said; and this is enough for faith; for faith only can take hold of the truth of God, and we walk by faith, not by sight {2 Cor. 5:7}.

Observe that this inestimable blessing, and the power too in dealing with others, are for even two or three

thus gathered together. How encouraging to those who desire to be here for the Lord in these last days! What a clear line of demarcation it lays down between being thus gathered together according to the Lord’s mind, and being occupied with mere traditions and confederacies of men! May we, through grace, be true to our Lord till He come.