

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE LORD WITH TWO OR THREE.

A Sermon

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“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”—Matthew xviii. 20.

WE have in the verses preceding the text a mention of the first *church-meeting* of which I remember to have found mention in the New Testament. The Saviour declares of his assembled people, “Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” A few believers, gathered out of the world, have met in the name of the Lord Jesus, to attend to the affairs of his household here below. It is a case of discipline. A brother has trespassed against another brother. The offended one has sought him out privately, and by personal expostulation has endeavoured to bring him to a better mind; but he has failed. He has then taken with him two or three brethren of the church, and they have together pleaded with the offender that he would do that which is right; but he is obstinate: even in the presence of two or three witnesses he persists in his trespass, and refuses to be won over by kindly entreaty. It only remains that they shall tell it to the church. The church is grieved; it hears the case patiently, and waits upon God in prayer. It asks guidance, and, at last, finding that there is no help for it, removes the member of the body who is not in true sympathy with the rest, and is acting as if he had not the life of God in him. This being done, according to Christ’s rule—justly, impartially, lovingly, with prayer—that which is done by a few men and women assembled here below, is registered in the court above. What they have bound on earth is bound in heaven. What they have loosed on earth is also loosed in heaven. It is a happy privilege when they can loose the bound one. When repentance is expressed, when the backslider is restored, when the church has reason to believe that the work of the Spirit is truly in the heart of the offender, then the bond is loosed on earth, and it is also loosed in heaven. The meetings of God’s servants for the necessary discipline of the church are not trifling meetings, but there is a divine power in them, since what they do is done in the name of Jesus Christ their Lord. Oh, that church-meetings were more generally looked at in this solemn light!

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Next, we are introduced to the *prayer-meeting*: in the nineteenth verse we read, "Again I say unto you, that if two of you," *two* of you, "shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." It is a very little meeting, it could not be smaller to be a meeting at all. There are only two there, but they are two praying men, and two believers. They are two of the Lord's own servants, whose great concern is his kingdom; they are two earnest persons who very greatly desire the prosperity of the church. They are two of kindred spirit, agreeing in love to God and the truth, and they have talked over the matter, and considered it, and they feel moved by the Spirit of God to unite their supplications about one important subject. Will they meet together and pray in vain? As they are only two, will not the meeting fail to count with God? Assuredly not; the Lord Jesus Christ has beforehand left them this gracious promise, that if they shall agree on earth touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of his Father which is in heaven: they are only two, but this suffices to secure them the promised hearing.

Perhaps the exact petition which they offer may not apparently be answered. Remember that God often hears the prayer of our prayers, and answers *that* rather than our prayers themselves; by which I mean, that there is an inner soul within true prayer which is the quickening life of true supplication. The body of prayer may die, but the soul of prayer lives and abides for ever. If I am asked what my inmost heart prays for, I should reply, The heart of my prayer is—"The will of the Lord be done." Is not this the essence, quintessence, and extract of the prayer by which our Saviour taught us how to pray? He bade us say, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." Is not this the finale of his own prayers, the entreaty of his passion, his deepest and yet his highest pleading, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt"? Now we want the will of the Lord to be *done*: we do not desire it to remain as a secret decree, but actually to be fulfilled; and it is ours, as it were, with the finger of prayer, to turn the folded leaves one by one, and exhibit them to the light of fact, so that the purpose of God may become an accomplished thing in answer to the prayer of his people. Mean we anything more than this by our prayers? I think that, when well instructed, this is neither more nor less than what we intend, and if it be really so, and we come together, delighting ourselves in the Lord, he will most certainly give us the desire of our hearts. When we come together with our wills sanctified into the likeness of the divine will, then our prayer succeeds, till it becomes no presumption even if we dare to say with Luther in one of his bold prayers, "Oh, my Lord, let *my* will be done this time!" He ventured to speak thus because he felt sure that his will must be in accordance with the divine will. Only there do you stand on solid ground; only there may you plead without any reserve for special blessings.

The prayer-meeting is not a farce, no waste of time, no mere pious amusement. Some in these times think so, but such shall be lightly esteemed. Surely they know not the omnipotence that lies in the pleas of God's people. The Lord has taken the keys of his royal treasury, and put them into the hand of faith. He has taken his sword from

the scabbard, and given it into the hand of the man mighty in prayer. He seems at times to have placed his sovereign sceptre in the hand of prayer. "Ask me concerning things to come: concerning my sons, command ye me." He permits us to speak with such boldness and daring that we overcome heaven by prayer, and dare to say to the covenant angel, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." If one Jacob can prevail over a wrestling angel, what can two do? What a victory would come to two who joined in the same wrestling! "One of you shall chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight." There is an accumulated power in united supplication: two do not only double the force, but multiply it tenfold. How soon the gate of mercy opens when two are knocking! God grant to each one of us a praying partner; when John pulls the oar of prayer let James join him in the hearty tug. Better still, may we always believe in our Father's presence at our prayer-meetings, so that we may find the words of Jesus true when he says, "It shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven."

Now, thirdly, we come to a promise which includes *every meeting of any sort* or kind which is for Christ's glory. So long as it is a sacred meeting of saintly men and women for the purposes of devotion or service—for the purposes of prayer or praise, or whatever else may be most suitable for the occasion, here is the promise for them—"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." This sanctions the church-meeting, this prospers the prayer-meeting. Overshadowing every gracious assembly of the chosen we see the great Shepherd of the sheep, who here expressly says, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Now, first, we shall mention with regard to these meetings, *matters not essential*; then, secondly, we shall carefully mention a *matter most essential*; and, thirdly, we shall dwell upon *an assurance most encouraging*.

I. First, let us speak of MATTERS NOT ESSENTIAL.

At the outset, we know that *numbers are not essential*, for "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I." It is very important in a large church that there should be large gatherings for prayer, for it would be an evidence of a slighting of the ordinance of united supplication if a fair proportion of the members did not come together for that holy and blessed exercise. But, still, where that cannot be—where the church itself is small—where, for divers reasons which we need not here recapitulate, it is not possible for many to gather together—it is a very encouraging circumstance that numbers are not essential to success in prayer. "Where *two or three* are gathered together." The number is mentioned, I suppose, because that is about the smallest number that could make a congregation. We can hardly call it a congregation where the minister has to say, "Dearly beloved Roger, the Scripture moveth us in divers places," as we have heard was once done by a clergyman: truly it was an assembly of two, and so was within the number, and under the circumstances might find the Lord present. But two out of a large church would have been a wretched sign of decline. If two were all that met out of a great church it would be a sadly little company, and the blessing might be

withheld. Two or three are mentioned, not to encourage absence, but to cheer the faithful few who do not forget the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some is.

Still, the number has this advantage, that it is the readiest congregation to be gathered. It is not difficult to make up two or three. A husband and wife: there are two. A husband and wife and a child: there are three. Or there may be two unmarried sisters, or a widow and child: two can be easily made up. Where there are no children, there may be a husband and a wife and a servant: and these are three. Where there is no wife, perhaps there are two brothers, or a brother and a sister, or perhaps three sisters; and where there is no relation, but a man lives alone, it is not impossible, surely, in the most deserted region for him to find one other or two others with whom he can meet. It is a very handy congregation, because it can meet in a bedroom; it can meet in a kitchen; it can meet in a closet: it can meet anywhere, for it is so small. It is also easily hidden away; in persecuting times two or three could get together in a corner, a cave, a cellar, or a garret. For the matter of that, two or three may be in prison together, and they can pray in one narrow cell; or they can do what Latimer and Ridley did when they stood back to back at the stake, and lifted up their hearts as one man. That was brave praying, when the two bishops stood to burn with devotion as well as to burn with fire for Christ's sake. I am sure that Jesus was in the midst of them when they met upon the faggots. Two people may meet in the street or in the field; they can get together in the corner of an omnibus or a train, and unite their supplications.

Two or three make a congregation which is among the small things, but who shall dare despise what God has blessed? I commend to you the frequent practice of praying by twos and threes. There was a minister who had a little society which he called the "Aaron and Hur Society." It consisted of two—one to hold up his right hand, and one to hold up his left, while, like Moses, he was on the mount pleading for Israel. We want this institution multiplied to any extent. We want the twos and threes as well as the one separately praying, and then a blessing will come. But numbers are not important at all; we need say no more about them except this,—I like to note that the text puts it "two or three," for, as one remarks, that is much better than "three or two." For if "three or two" are gathered together, they are getting smaller; but if it be "two or three," they are evidently upon the increase. If they have only increased from two to three, they have advanced fifty per cent., and that is something. If this congregation were to do that, where should we all be able to meet on the Sabbath? On week nights I would encourage you to try to increase till we fill the upper gallery as well as the rest of the building. "Two or three." It is a growing congregation: but still numbers are not essential to good speed in prayer.

Next, *the rank of the people is not important.* Does it say, "Where two or three *ministers* are gathered together in my name"? By no means. Ministers may expect the Lord to be in the midst of them, but they have no special promise as ministers: they must come before the Lord as plain believers. The "two or three" may be unable to utter

a word by way of teaching the great congregation, but this is not mentioned in the promise. Does it say, "Where two or three instructed Christians, advanced in experience, are met together"? No, there is no such limit expressed or implied. In the matter of prayer no special boon is set apart for those who are eminent in grace. We do not read, "Where two or three full-grown believers are met;" much less does it say, "Where two or three rich people are met together." No distinction is made. If they are the people of God, and if they are the little ones whom the Lord has been describing, humble and lowly in spirit, where two or three of such are met together in the Redeemer's name "there," says Jesus, "am I in the midst of them." It may be that a poor man and his wife are praying together before retiring for the night. The Lord is there. A couple of servants unite their supplications in the kitchen. The Lord is there. Two or three little boys have come out of school, and they love the Lord, and so they have met in a corner to pray. The Lord is there. Do you remember how Luther was encouraged while he, and Melancthon too, were down in the dumps about the Lord's work? They were dreadfully downcast; but as Luther passed by a room, he heard the voices of children and he stopped. Some women, the wives of good men, had gathered with a few holy children, and they were praying the Lord to let the gospel spread in the teeth of the Pope and all his friends from below. Luther went back and said, "It is all right. The children are praying to God. The Lord will hear them. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hath he ordained strength." So you see in the promise of the divine presence there is nothing said about numbers, and nothing about rank.

Neither is a word said as to *place*, except that it says "*where* two or three." "*Where*" means anywhere. In any place where two or three are met together in Christ's name there is he. Not in the cathedral only, but in the barn; not in the tabernacle only, but in the field. "*Where*" means everywhere. In the loneliest place, in the far-away forest, in an upper room, or on board ship, or in an hospital.

"Jesus, where'er thy people meet,
There they behold thy mercy-seat:
Where'er they seek thee, thou art found,
And every place is hallowed ground;

"For thou within no walls confined,
Inhabitest the humble mind;
Such ever bring thee where they come,
And going, take thee to their home."

Anywhere Christ will be with you when you are with him in prayer. Have you never read how the Covenanters, when the times of peace came on, and they could worship in the kirk, yet, nevertheless, often looked back with sadness to the glorious days they had in the mosses and on the bleak hill-sides when they were hunted by Claverhouse's dragoons, and the Lord covered them with the skirts of his garments? See the preacher reading his text by the lightning flash, and hear his voice sounding afterwards amid the thick darkness! The saints who had gathered together to hear the word of God had an overpowering sense of his presence which nothing could excel. Anywhere

we may meet for prayer and expect Jesus to be in the midst of us. The place is not essential even in the lowest degree. When I see people running out every morning to church, it savours of a superstition which ought to have died out long ago. When you look into the church you will find no great number assembled; generally the rector and one or two of the family make up the company. But if the whole parish came trooping out to church, I should say that they had better stay at home and pray with their families. Family prayer is a better institution than the tinkling of a bell every morning, and the collecting of people in a church. Have a bell of your own, and be your own priest, and open your Bible, and pray yourself with your children, and that will be a more acceptable sacrifice than if you plod in your superstition half-a-mile to a so-called sacred place to enjoy the voice of a supposed priestly man. Dedicate your parlour; consecrate your sitting-room; make your kitchen into a church for God: for there is no sacredness in bricks, and mortar, and stone, and stained glass. The outside of a church is as holy as the inside. Far ought such an age as this to be from the revolting superstition which makes the houses of the godly to be common and unclean in order to magnify the parish church. May we get back to the simplicity of Christ! "Neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, shall men worship the Father." The time is coming, yea and now is, when in every place God seeketh spiritual worshippers who worship him in spirit and in truth.

And will you please to notice this, that as numbers and rank and place are all non-essentials, so also is the *time*? There may be—there ought to be to us from holy habit—an hour of prayer. But though that be especially and rightly the hour of prayer—for he that has no appointed time for prayer may probably forget to pray—yet still that pious custom must never degenerate into superstition as though heaven's gate were opened at a certain quarter of an hour, and shut during all the rest of the day. Meet whenever you please, no time will be unseasonable. All hours are good, from twelve o'clock at night to twelve o'clock the next night, and so onward. The hour of prayer is the hour of need, the hour of opportunity, the hour of desire, the hour when you can come together. Let every hour, according as occasion permits you, become the hour of prayer. I have heard it said sometimes in the country, "Well, we cannot get our people together for a prayer-meeting because they are busy at the harvest." If the preacher were to get up at four o'clock in the morning, and hold a meeting for prayer out in the field itself while yet the dew is on the grass, would it not be a capital thing for him and for his flock? Suppose the people cannot come to pray at six o'clock in the evening, make it seven, make it eight, make it nine, make it ten. Perhaps the young folks had better be in bed at so late an hour, and there may thus be legitimate objections to some hours for public gatherings; but yet twos and threes may sit up as late as they like to pray, and no policeman will come round and tell them to go to bed. Our rulers do not ring the curfew now. The Lord our God doth neither slumber nor sleep; he is ever waiting to be gracious.

And, once more, there is nothing said here about *the form which the meeting is to take*. "Where two or three are met together in my name,

there am I in the midst of them." "They are going to break bread together." Very well, they are quite at liberty to do so, and if they have met in the Lord's name, he will be in the midst of them. "But they are going to hear a sermon." All right: so they may. Preaching is an ordinance of God, and he will be in the midst of them. "But they are neither going to hold the communion, nor to hear a sermon; they are going to pray." Quite right: the Lord will be in their midst. "But they are not going to pray, that is to say, vocally; they are going to read a chapter, and sit and think of it." Quite right: the Lord will be in the midst of them. "But they are not even going to read, or sing, or pray vocally: they are going to sit still." The Lord will be in the midst of them if they meet in the name of Jesus. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Do not be the dupes of those who say, "This one particular form of service is the only one." Christ has not put it so. And we will not be brought into any bondage by those who call themselves "Brethren," and are the most unbrotherly brothers that ever lived. They tell us that we are all wrong: we cannot expect to have the Lord with us. To answer these is not difficult. Dear brothers, we are not at all grieved by your talking as you do, for we know you are wrong, since *we have the Lord with us*. It does not matter at all to us what you say so long as we enjoy *his* company, and see the prosperity which *he* gives to us. So long as we do not quarrel with one another once every few years, we are not anxious to follow you in your methods, which are illustrated by your bitter feuds. As long as we do not split up into the most miserable sections of sectarians that ever disgraced the name of Christ, we shall not be greatly wounded by any remarks which you have to make. Condemn and welcome, for your condemnations are mere wind. May your objurgations be blessed to us, and may they ease your minds, also, by relieving your minds of a little of your bitterness. We believe that any form which true worship takes is a form which the Lord Jesus Christ not only tolerates, but sanctions, if his Spirit be there. But if you meet without that Spirit of God, even though you should think yourselves infallibly correct in the form which your meeting assumes, that form will be of very little use to you. I bless God for the grand liberty of worship which is given here. I bless God that he has not laid down this regulation and that, but has left his people to his own free Spirit. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

So much on non-essentials.

II. But now, secondly, there is A MATTER WHICH IS MOST ESSENTIAL, and that is, that they should be gathered *in Christ's name*. Does not this mean that the gathering must be that of Christians met together as Christians to have fellowship with Jesus Christ and so with one another? Does it not mean that they must be met together in obedience to his will as they understand it, to carry out his will as they find it in the New Testament, and as the Spirit of God opens up that New Testament to them? Does it not also mean that they must be met together distinctly for the Lord's purposes?—to honour Christ, to bring

glory to his name, to worship him? They must be met together not to a kind of mystic, invisible, unknown Christ, but in his name, for Christ has a name—a distinct personality, a character; and that must be known, loved, and honoured; or else we have not met in his name. Are we not to meet because he bids us meet, and because we have his authority for meeting, his authority for breaking bread, his authority for baptism, his authority for prayer, his authority for praise, his authority for the ministry of the word, his authority for reading the Scriptures, his authority for mutual edification, or whatever form of worship seems most suitable? We meet not to carry out our own devices, but to carry out that which is appointed us by our Lord himself.

And does not this gathering into his name mean that we are, first, to be known by his name, and then to get close to one another by drawing more and more near to him? The way to be gathered together is to be gathered by him and to him. If all press to the centre, they all press to one another. If each man's aim be personal fellowship with Christ, personal knowledge of Christ, personal trust in Christ, personal adoration of Christ, personal service to Christ, and the getting of a personal likeness to Christ, then we are all coming together. While our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ, we also have fellowship with all the saints. This should be the great object of all our gatherings, to be brought more fully into Christ; and all of us must meanwhile believe that Jesus is in the midst and we must come together unto him. You do not meet to-night to listen to a certain preacher, but because through that preacher you have been helped to get nearer to the Lord Jesus Christ, and, therefore, you are glad to hear his voice, and glad to worship God with those friends with whom you have fellowship in Christ. You do well to come where you have found Christ before: and you do well to stay away from any gathering wherein you have not found Christ. Some, as they go out of the place where they usually worship, are sadly compelled to cry, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." Do not go where Jesus is not present; and if distinctly you are obliged to say, "I have heard sermon after sermon almost without mention of his name; I have gone for months together, and I have not had a sweet thought of heavenly fellowship arising out of the service;" then do not go there again. Do not go to any church or meeting-house merely because you have been in the habit of going. If your father used to live in Islington, but has now removed, you do not think it needful to go and call at his empty house: do you? Go where the Lord has met with you, and where you may expect that he will meet with you again. Sabbaths are too precious to be thrown away by sitting still to be starved. Even a cow does not care to be tied up in an empty stall, and a horse does not run to an empty manger. Seek the Lord Jesus, and do not rest till you find him. We must gather into his name and get closer and closer to it, or else the Lord's day will run to waste, and barrenness will devour our souls.

III. Now, as usual, I have taken up too much time with these first two heads, for the last is the most important, and that is, AN ASSURANCE MOST ENCOURAGING—"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

First then, very briefly, *how is the Lord Jesus there?* Notice the

exact words. Catch the gracious sense. He does not say, "I *will be* there," but he does say, "I *am* there." He is the first at the gathering; "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there **AM I.**" Not "I will be," though that is true; but he puts it in a more divine fashion,—"There am I." Jesus is there already before another arrives. He is the first in the congregation, the first comer in the assembly, and they come gathering to him. He is the centre, and they come to him. "There am I."

How is he there? As we, his people, meet, he is there, because he is in every one of them. It is a blessed thing to see Christ in his people. Did you ever try to do that? I know some who try to see the old man in Christ's people. It does not take them long to see the body of sin and death, and it is not a refreshing sight when they do see it. But, oh, to see Christ in his people—what a charming sight it is! And I think, with regard to every child of God that I know, that I can see a little more of Christ in him than I can see in myself. I cultivate the practice of endeavouring to see my Lord in all his people, for he is there, and it is irreverent not to honour him. He is with them, and is in them; why should we doubt it? That is something worth remembering. If so many temples of the Holy Ghost come together, why, surely, the Holy Ghost himself is there, and the place whereon they stand is holy ground. Jesus is in their thoughts, in their objects, in their desires; ay, and in their groans, in their sorrows, in their spirits, in their inmost souls. Where two or three are gathered together in his name, there is he in the midst of them.

And, next, he is with us in his Word. When the Book is opened, it is not mere words, it is the living and "incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever"; and the Christ is in it as the immortal life, the secret life-germ in every seed that we sow. Christ is the way, if we teach men the road to heaven. Christ is the truth, if we preach the doctrines of grace. Christ is the life, if we enjoy and feed upon his precious name. Where his Word is preached, there he is; for it shall not return to him void, but it shall prosper in the thing whereto he has sent it.

Christ is in his ordinances. He has not dissociated himself from baptism, which is the blessed symbol in which his death, burial, and resurrection are clearly set forth. He has not separated himself from that other ordinance, in which we behold his passion and see the way in which we become partakers of it, by feeding upon his body and his blood. He has promised to be with us even to the end of the world in the keeping up of those divine memorials of his incarnation and atonement, his life and his death.

And then the Lord Jesus Christ is with the assembly by his Spirit. The Spirit is his representative, whom he has sent as the Comforter to abide with us for ever. You must have felt him sometimes convincing you of sin, humbling you, and bowing you down; then cheering you, comforting you, enlightening you, guiding you, relieving you, sustaining you, sanctifying you. Oh, what light he brings! What life he brings! What love he brings! What joy he brings! When the Spirit of God is in the midst of God's people what merry days they have! What days of heaven upon earth!

Does not this fact that Christ is among his people show us that he must be divine? How can he be everywhere in all the assemblies of his people unless he is the omnipresent God? There may be professing Christians who feel a kind of fellowship with Socinians, but I have none. I will not call them Unitarians, for I am as truly a Unitarian myself as any of them can be. I no more believe in three Gods than I believe in thirty gods. There is but one God to me, and therefore I am in that sense a Unitarian, and Socinians have no right to the name merely because they deny the Godhead of our Lord Jesus. We believe Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to be one God; but Jesus Christ is God, and whosoever casts that truth away casts away eternal life. How can he enter into heaven if he does not know Christ as the everlasting Son of the Father? He must be God, since he has promised to be in ten thousand places at one time, and no mere man could do that.

Next, *where is the Lord in the assembly?* He has promised to be with his people; but where is he? "There am I *in the midst of them.*" Not up in the corner, but here in the midst of them is the Lord. He is the centre to which all saints gather. He is the sun in the heavens lighting all. He is the heart in the midst of the body giving life to all the members. "In the midst of them." Is not that delightful? The Lord Jesus Christ does not come into the assembly of his people to bless the minister only. No, you are all equally near in proportion to the grace of nearness you have received. He is in the midst of you, in the centre of all hearts. Like the centre of a wheel, from which all the spokes radiate, Jesus Christ is the middle of the company. Armies place the king or some great general in the heart of the host, in the place of honour and command; so, as our army marches to battle, our King is in the centre. The King is in the midst of the saints in all his glory, and his presence is their strength and their assurance of victory. Glory be to our present Lord: he is in the midst of us now.

And if he be in the midst of his people, *what will he do?* Why, he is there to sanction every little gathering of his people—to say to the twos and threes, "You are not Dissenters, for you have met with me. You are not Nonconformists: you are conformed to me, and I am one with you. You are the Established Church—you two or three. I have established you in my everlasting love; those that meet in my name I have established them, and I have endowed them; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them. I sanction your assemblies if you are my people." He is there *to bless* those who supplicate and adore. But, mark you, the text does not say this in so many words; and do not you say it, brother, next time you pray. Did I not hear you say, "Lord, thou hast said, 'Where two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them, *and that to bless them, and do them good*'"? That last little bit is your own. That addition is not in the Bible, for it is not the Lord's way to say what never need be said. What other blessing do we want than Christ in the midst of us? If he is there, the blessing is not what he gives: but *he himself is the blessing.* It is not what he does: *it is himself.* It is not even what he says: *it is himself.* Oh, blessed be his name for what he gives, and blessed be his name for what he does, and blessed be his name for what he says: but still more blessed be his name because he *himself* loved

us, and gave *himself* for us, and now comes *himself* into the midst of his people.

Now, dear friends, if Christ himself be in the midst of his people, he will bring us peace, just as he did when he dropped into the assembly of the eleven, the doors being shut. He stood and said, "Peace be unto you!" and when he had said that he showed them his hands and his side. It was himself, his own peace, and his own person which made his disciples glad. Then he said, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." This was his own commission from his own lips to his own servants, and having said this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Thus his own breath and his own Spirit coming upon them made them strong for service, and that is what he means when he says, "I am in the midst of them."

Does not this make our meetings delightful—Christ in the midst of us? Does not this make our meetings important? How one ought to strain a point to be there! If we have met with Christ aforetime we shall not bear to be away. We shall long to meet him again, and count it a great denial if we must be absent. Does not this make our meetings influential? The gatherings of God's people are centres of influence. When the gathering contains but two or three, if Christ is there, the eternal power and Godhead are present; and out of this Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. Where even two or three are met together, and he is in the midst of them, "there breaks he the arrows of the bow, the sword, and the shield, and the battle." He will make his power known, and the glory of his grace shall go forth out of those little companies even to the ends of the earth.

"Where two or three, with sweet accord,
Obedient to their sovereign Lord,
Meet to recount his acts of grace,
And offer solemn prayer and praise:

"'There,' says the Saviour, 'will I be,
Amid this little company:
To them unveil my smiling face,
And shed my glories round the place.'"

"Oh, but," say you, "the pulpit is the great power of God, is it not?" I answer, it is so because of the prayers of God's people. One may speak, but what of that, unless the rest shall pray? Preaching is God's ordinance—his battle-axe and weapons of war; but, as far as the church is concerned, the arm that wields these weapons must be the prayer of the whole body of the faithful—the gathering together of the saints in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Wherefore, forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is," but come ye together as often as ye have opportunity, not neglecting other duties, but balancing them one with the other. He says, "Seek ye my face." Let your cry be, "Thy face, Lord, will we seek." When Sir Thomas Abney was Lord Mayor of London, in the middle of the banquet which takes place on the first night, he disappeared for a quarter-of-an-hour, and when he came back, he said to the friends around him that he had been keeping a particular engagement with a most intimate friend, and so he had retired for awhile. That appointment was to have family prayer

with his household in the Mansion House, and that gathering for prayer he would not have given up on any account whatever. Say to all other things, "You must stand back, I have a particular appointment; I must meet the Lord Jesus Christ with two or three of his people. He says that he will be there, and I should not like him to say, 'Where is my servant? Where is my son? Where is my daughter? Are they absent when I am here?'"

It is such a blessing to get to know the Lord Jesus personally. I heard the other day of a famous infidel, an agnostic,—that is, an ignominus, a person who knows nothing,—and he went to a certain house to meet an elderly lady of considerable literary renown. He was told that she believed in the Word of God, and was a faithful follower of the Lord Jesus, so he thought that he would have a word with her before he went away. "Madam," said he, "I have been astonished to hear one thing of you. I hear that you believe in the Bible." "Yes, sir," she said, "every word of it." "And pray, Madam," he said, "however came you to believe in that book?" She replied, "One of the principal reasons that I have for believing in the Book is that I am intimately acquainted with the Author of it." That was a blessed answer. Faith gets to know Christ; and so, knowing Christ, and meeting him in the midst of his people, it becomes armed against all unbelief, and goes forth in its panoply conquering and to conquer. So will it be with you, beloved, if you meet the Well-beloved alone in your closets, and if you add to this a frequent attendance at the holy assembly. I pray you, do not let us have to complain that one of you is away. Come always. My heart will rejoice if our meetings are filled with men and women who there seek communion with Jesus. Come, for Jesus is with us. Come, for it would be most unseemly for him to be here and you away. I pray you come, and make this house like heaven, which is thronged with shining ones who rejoice because Jesus is in their midst. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew xviii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—168, 988, 785.
