

The Truth of Gathering to the Lord Jesus Christ

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One of the defining scriptural principles in relation to the local assembly is the truth that the believers gather to the Name & Person of the Lord Jesus, the Lord is at the centre of every gathering of the saints, our gathering centre is Christ Himself, He is the One who is “**in the midst**”. This is a wonderful truth, the truth of gathering to the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, a truth that will keep & preserve the believer in God’s assembly for the rest of life, or until our Lord returns.

For some, there was a time in adult life when you came to the assembly, you left behind wherever you were before, and you were convicted about the truth of the assembly and gathering to Christ. But for many of us (the writer included), we were brought up in the assembly, brought up attending assembly meetings from an early age, which is a wonderful privilege, just as it is a great privilege to be born into a family with Christian parents and to hear the gospel & know the scriptures from an early age. But with such an upbringing, you have never known or experienced anything else other than the local assembly, and there must come a time when you develop real conviction about the assembly, and why you want to be part of the local assembly. And it will only be when this wonderful truth of gathering to the Lord Jesus makes real impressions upon your soul, that you will have conviction about the assembly, and gathering with the believers around the Person of Christ, such that you will not have any desire to leave.

This truth ultimately (like all of divine truth) must be divinely revealed to us by the Spirit of God, although we must be sensitive to the working of the Spirit and be prepared to receive it. But if you do not ever get this conviction, then there is every likelihood that you will follow in the path of many others, many others who have been brought up in assemblies, but at some point in late teenage years or perhaps a little later in adult life, they cease to attend. Either they never take the step of being received into the fellowship, and then simply stop attending the meetings, or if they have been received into the fellowship, their attendance becomes increasingly episodic & inconsistent, until they leave the assembly. That has happened with many, time after time after time. But this truth of gathering to the wonderful Person of our Lord Jesus is truth that will hold us & keep us in God’s assembly, because it gives a unique distinctiveness to the local assembly, compared with so much else that is in the sphere of Christendom. And we suggest that **gathering to the Person of Christ is the greatest privilege of assembly fellowship.**

Privileges of Assembly Fellowship:

There are many privileges of being in the fellowship of the local assembly. There is the **fellowship of the saints**, the encouragement of being in fellowship with fellow believers, being amongst those who love the Lord & think as much of Christ as you do. There are privileges connected with being engaged in the **collective worship, service & testimony** of the assembly, the remembrance of Christ, the worship of divine Persons, gospel outreach etc. Being in the fellowship of the local assembly brings you into a **sphere of spiritual protection**, such that you are no longer in the sphere of the world where Satan, the prince of this world, rules & operates. In the sphere of local assembly fellowship, there is that hedge of protection, such that Satan has much less power or influence over the believer, because the assembly is the place of the Lord's presence, the dwelling place of the Spirit of God and of Christ, the sphere where the divine presence is known. Believers in assembly fellowship are thus afforded the privilege of very real divine care & spiritual protection. It is therefore an immensely solemn thing, for one who has known the protection of assembly fellowship, to withdraw from it, or to be put out of it due to discipline, and then to be exposed to all the malign attention & accusations of the evil one. Being in the assembly, you are under the **spiritual care** of those men who the Spirit of God has raised up in the company to be overseers, shepherds over the flock of God, those who will be your guides & examples to follow; Hebrews 13v17 "**Obey them that have the rule over you** (i.e. your guides, Newberry), **and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls**".

But the greatest, the grandest, the most blessed privilege connected with assembly fellowship, is this truth of **gathering to the Lord Jesus Christ**, being gathered to His Name. And as always, privilege brings responsibility, and the greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility, and as we continue we will suggest some of the responsibilities connected with this truth of gathering to the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is a scriptural principle all through God's Word that it is His purpose & desire to draw His people around Himself. God says in Psalm 50v5 "**Gather My saints together unto Me**". In the past, it was His earthly people, the children of Israel, who were gathered around Him; we see that in the tabernacle in the wilderness where God dwelt among His people and they gathered around Him, "**Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them**" (Exodus 25v8). The entire camp of Israel, and their 12 tribes, was organised around the tabernacle in a very orderly way, Numbers 2v2 "**Every man of the children of Israel shall pitch by his own standard, with the ensign of their father's house: far off about the tabernacle of the congregation shall they pitch**". And presently, it is God's heavenly people, the Church, who gather here on earth in local companies around His Son, until the day comes when the entire Church will be raptured out of this world, and we will all gather around Christ for a blessed future eternity.

Genesis 49v10:

The Truth of Gathering in Prophecy

In Genesis 49, we have the blessing & prophecies of the aged Jacob upon his sons, and when it comes to Judah, v10 **“The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between His feet, until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be”**. That prophecy found an initial fulfilment in the son Judah; 1st Chronicles 5v2 **“For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler”**. It also found fulfilment in God’s earthly people, the tribe of Judah becoming the royal or kingly tribe, from Judah was to come God’s lawgiver, His chief ruler. But the prophecy had in view ultimately the Lord Jesus, who sprang from that royal tribe of Judah; **“For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah”** (Hebrews 7v14), He is **“the Lion of the tribe of Juda”** (Revelation 4v5). It has always been God’s purpose for His people to be gathered around His own dear Son, in acknowledgement of His Lordship, appreciating Him as the sovereign Ruler, that **“unto Him shall the gathering of the people be”**.

In the Revised Version & Newberry, it is **“peoples”** in plural, and really this prophecy concerning the Lord Jesus will find its ultimate fulfilment in that coming day of Christ’s glorious Kingdom, when He will sit on the throne of His father David, and reign over this world as King of kings & Lord of lords, the divine Chief Ruler. Then, the Nation of Israel, and every nation & people on earth, will be gathered around Christ, acknowledging His righteous rule & desiring His blessing. The name **“Shiloh”** may therefore be seen as a Messianic title of the Lord Jesus, and has the thought of Him as the Pacificator (Newberry) or Peacemaker, for He will reign as **“the Prince of peace”**, and preside over a Kingdom in which there will be unprecedented peace.

Today, men’s hearts are perplexed & fearful, as they think on a world so insecure, capable & seemingly intent on destroying itself. But the Psalmist says in Psalm 24v1 **“The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof”**, and He will not allow men to destroy what He has created. And further, this whole earth was purchased at Calvary by the precious blood of Christ; in the parables of the Kingdom in Matthew 13, **“the field is the world”**, and He purchased the whole field, to acquire the treasure (i.e. the Church) hid in that field. There will be very far reaching implications of the death of Christ for this world, a day when the creation will be **“delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God”** (Romans 8v21). There will be that glorious Millennial day when the whole earth will be in the good of Calvary’s sacrifice, and it will be specifically a time of unparalleled peace, when He who is the Peacemaker (Shiloh) comes, and all peoples & nations will be gathered unto Him. Isaiah 11v10 **“And in that day there shall be a root out of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people (peoples, Newberry); to it shall the Gentiles (nations, Newberry) seek: and His rest shall be glorious”**.

The OT prophets speak of the peaceful conditions of that coming Millennial age. Isaiah 2v4 & Micah 4v3-4 **“And He shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid”**. All then will dwell in safety & security, without fear. Jerusalem today is a city under siege; every house & apartment block has its underground bomb shelter. But in that day of peace, all will be able to enjoy God’s fresh air, sitting at peace under their vine & fig tree. Zechariah 8v4-5 **“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 every age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys & girls playing in the streets thereof”**, because there will be no danger, no mugging of pensioners or abuse of children. It will be a reign of peace that will extend also to the animal kingdom; Isaiah 11v6-9 **“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of an asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea”**. Animals which today prey upon one another, and upon man, will in that day dwell in peace & tranquillity. It is all a lovely description of the peaceful conditions that will prevail when Shiloh, the divine Peacemaker, shall come.

Such will be that glorious Kingdom of our Lord Jesus, Isaiah 9v7 **“Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgement and with justice from henceforth even for ever.”** When Shiloh comes, and all are gathered to Him, it will then be a glorious Kingdom of unending peace & justice, presided over by the Prince of Peace. He will then take His place in the midst of His people. The name of the millennial city is given in the last verse of Ezekiel’s prophecy, (ch48v35), **“The name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there”**. The Lord is there, Jehovah-Shammah, He will be there, in the midst of that restored Nation in a future day. In the language of Zechariah 2; v10 **“Sing & rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD”**, v11 **“And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be My people: and (He repeats) I will dwell in the midst of thee”**, v12 **“And the LORD shall inherit Judah His portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again”**. Truly Israel will in that millennial day be ‘the holy land’, because the LORD will be there, dwelling in the midst of His people and many nations, **“and unto Him shall the gathering of the peoples be”**.

1st Samuel 22v1-2:

The Truth of Gathering in Picture

In this chapter we see a group of about 400 men gathering to David, who was being hunted by Saul the king, in the cave Adullam. In v2, **“every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them”**. They came therefore to David in all their need of him, in order that their needs be met by him, and they were happy to be under David as their captain & to know his protection. What a lovely picture this is of our gathering to the Lord Jesus today. We came to Him in all our great debt & need as sinners, and He met our need according to the riches of divine grace, and He blessed us according to the riches of divine glory, with an abundance of spiritual blessings, and thus we are happy to gather to Him who has fully met our need. And truly He has become a Captain over us; He is **“the Captain”** of our salvation, who is bringing many sons unto glory (Hebrews 2v10), His spiritual protection over us will never fail.

When we think of David as **“captain over them”**, those who gathered to David must have yielded to him, and his word must have been as a law to them. We are caused to appreciate that the One we gather to is our sovereign Lord, He is the One to Whom we must yield & be subject to. In gathering to the Person of Christ, we must acknowledge **His Lordship**. Likewise, as their captain, those who gathered to David had desires to serve him, and to please him. When David expressed in the cave of Adullam his longing & desire of heart to drink again of the water from the well of Bethlehem, by the gate of Bethlehem, it was like a command to those around him. Three of his mighty men then risked their lives in breaking through the host of the Philistines, to bring that drink to David their captain (2nd Samuel 23v13-17). So as we gather to the Person of our Lord Jesus, we truly acknowledge His Lordship in His assembly, it must be His will & His word that is carried out, and we desire to serve Him & to please Him alone.

Every step of progress in the pathway of faith involves acknowledging the Lordship of Christ, and bowing in obedience to Him. At our conversion, we confess Him as Lord & Saviour, Romans 10v9 **“if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved”**. At conversion, we **“were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord”** (1st Corinthians 1v9). The language of conversion is (Acts 9v6) **“Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?”** The next specific step involves our baptism, another way in which we acknowledge His Lordship, when in simple obedience to our Lord’s command we are baptised. Baptism is not an optional thing, it is my public confession of the Lordship of Christ, **“One Lord, one faith, one baptism”** (Ephesians 4v5). And then when it comes to local assembly reception, it is again an acknowledgement of the Lordship of Christ. It is interesting to notice the language of scripture in the book of Acts, relevant to those who

were added to the Church. In Acts 2v47 **“And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved”**. Then in Acts 5v14 **“And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men & women”**. Similarly in Acts 11v24 **“and much people was added unto the Lord”**. So there were those being added by the Lord (Acts 2) and also being added to the Lord (Acts 5 & 11), indicating that the Lord adds to the sphere where His Lordship is collectively acknowledged; and He could not do otherwise. The Lord will only add to the sphere where His Lordship is collectively acknowledged; the exhortation of Barnabus to those who gathered in Antioch (Acts 11v23) was **“that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord”**. We must therefore grasp this basic truth, that as we gather in the assembly to the Lord Jesus alone, we acknowledge that He must be Lord in His assembly.

Philippians 2 speaks of the day when all the universe will be obliged to bow down before Him, v10-11 **“That at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”**. It will then be an obligation upon all to bow the knee, to confess His Lordship, and that will not be for universal salvation, it will be for universal subjugation, all will be subject to Christ, He will receive universal vindication. But what will be an obligation for all men in that coming day, is an obligation for us today who gather to Him in the local assembly. We are pleased to confess His Lordship, and in every collective gathering of the assembly, His Lordship is acknowledged, and publicly pronounced. That is what makes the breaking of bread meeting in particular so very precious; every Sunday morning we gather for the Lord’s Supper, 1st Corinthians 11v26 **“for as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till He come”**, and thus we own His sovereign Lordship over us, we pronounce that He is Lord. Young believer, grasp the significance of these things & appreciate the implications of being received into the fellowship of God’s assembly. It involves being added unto the Lord, being added to the sphere where His Lordship is collectively acknowledged, where all must bow to His authority, and that leaves no room at all for self-will or self-pleasing.

Acknowledgement of His Lordship means there is the responsibility to be absolutely obedient to His Word, since He is Lord. We cannot start to pick & choose which parts of the apostolic teaching we do want to obey, and which parts we don’t want. We cannot decide, for example, to accept Paul’s teaching on the Church as the body of Christ in Ephesians, but then reject his teaching relating to the local church, such as he gives in 1st Corinthians regarding the expression of headship & sisters keeping silent in the church. As we gather to the Lord Jesus, acknowledging His sovereign Lordship in the assembly, we are responsible to obey His every command, as it has been given to us in His Word. In Acts 2v42, **“And they continued stedfastly in (number 1) the apostles doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers”**.

Further, for those men who gathered to David in the cave, it wasn't grand & glorious by the world's standards, it was just a cave. But what drew them was the person, for in David they had everything they required, they were not looking to anyone else or anywhere else to meet their needs. So it is in the assembly, as we gather to Christ, we look only to Him for all things, and we do not need anything else from the world outside. This is connected more with an acknowledgement of **His Headship**, He is the Head of the Church, and His Headship is displayed in the assembly, as we look only to Him who is our exalted Head for supply, for succour, for direction, for edification. It is not the wisdom of men that we need in the assembly; it is the supply of Christ our Head.

In Luke 22, the Lord instructs Peter & John to go to prepare the Passover, and they are directed to "**a large upper room furnished**", it is the perfect participle (Newberry), i.e. "having been furnished". Here is another simple picture of the local assembly, a place divinely furnished by God & fully furnished with nothing less than the presence & Person of Christ. We have all that we will ever need when we gather, when we have Christ our Head in our midst. We do not need to bring in things from outside, from the world, to equip or furnish the local assembly. It is good & sensible to have a suitably comfortable hall to gather in, but we do not need overly elaborate, fancy ornate buildings, grand furnishings, stain glass windows, beautiful organ music and choirs, men dressed in robes and fine garments etc. That is all what pertains in Christendom, but it is all just man-made religion, and none of that is to be found in the Word of God. The local assembly needs not to be furnished with any of these things, for with Christ in the midst it is divinely furnished, it is fully furnished with His holy presence. And we can enjoy His presence with nothing of the distractions of man-made religion. To the world & to unbelievers, there is nothing about the assembly to attract men, it looks weak & unimpressive, but as God's beloved Son is given His proper & pre-eminent place, it means everything to God, & it delights His heart.

So, just as David had that pre-eminent place in the cave Adullam, amongst those who gathered to him, he was "**captain over them**", so in the assembly Christ must have the pre-eminent & central place. Colossians 1v18 "**That in all things He might have the pre-eminence**". In John's 3rd epistle, John speaks of one called Diotrephes, v9 "**who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them**". He was taking the place Christ alone should have. It has often been noted that in the scriptures, there is a man called Quartus (no.4, Romans 16v23), a man called Tertius (no.3, Romans 16v22), and a man called Secundus (no.2, Acts 20v4), but there is no-one named Primus (no.1), because Christ is Primus, He alone is pre-eminent. Diotrophes was loving to be Primus, he was usurping Christ, and we must be preserved from such a thing as that.

Matthew 18v20:

The Truth of Gathering in Promise

The Lord has given to us the promise of His presence in the midst of the gathered saints, "**For where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them**". In Matthew's gospel, the Lord Jesus will speak about the Church in a 2-fold way. And interestingly Matthew is the only gospel that makes specific mention of the Church, for Matthew is the gospel that puts things in a dispensational order & context, i.e. the ways of our God in different periods of time, and so Matthew will tell us of the place that the Church has in the dispensational dealings of God with man. In ch16v18, following the confession of Peter "**Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God**", says the Lord "**upon this rock** (i.e. not Peter, but the truth of Peter's divinely revealed confession regarding the Lord) **I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it**". This in ch16 is in reference to the Church in its largest aspect, the Church in its universal character, embracing every individual believer born of the Spirit of God. It is Christ the Son of the living God who is the bedrock, the foundation of the NT Church.

But in ch18v17 "**if he** (the offending brother) **shall neglect to hear them** (2 or 3 witnesses), **tell it unto the church**", i.e. the local church or local assembly of gathered saints, to which a matter might be told. It is thus the local assembly in view in v20 "**For where ... there am I in the midst of them**". We trust that all who are in assembly fellowship have a real sense of this great privilege. That every time the saints gather in capacity as the local assembly, the risen Christ, the Lord Himself is present in the midst in a very real and special way, according to His own promise. Just as the gathering commences, in a miraculously special & spiritual yet real way, the Lord takes His place in our midst. Physically & bodily, He is in heaven, but spiritually & personally He comes amongst companies of His people on earth, "**there am I in the midst of them**", and the saints gather around Him with a conscious appreciation of His personal presence. Gathering unto His Name supposes His absence, but it secures His certain presence. So, Christ has promised to be in the midst of His gathered saints, a divine principle for gathering for a local assembly, we are assured of His personal presence in our midst, and this is His rightful pre-eminent place. Every gathering is Christ-centred, we gather unto Him & His Name, we own no other name, we have no other cause for gathering. We must believe it with all our hearts, and we must cling tenaciously to such a precious truth, for it will bring unique character to every gathering of the local assembly.

This truth is clearly not affected by the size of the company; be it literally the two or three believers, or be it two or three hundred, whatever the size, His presence is the same, He takes His place in the midst of those who gather to His Name alone. The Lord it seems had the latter end of this dispensation in mind when He spoke of the "**two or three**". It was not two or three when the

Church began, in the early Acts it was thousands who were gathered. WW Fereday writes *“There were no twos or threes in the first days of the Church; all that believed were together. Men speaking perverse things had not arisen, nor had grievous wolves come into the flock to scatter and devour”*. It is the case today, in some parts of the world, that there are many assemblies that are small numerically, barely a handful of saints, but continuing steadfastly to gather to the Person of Christ, and His promise will hold good to the end, until He comes again.

The gathering together in this verse is not primarily the action of the two or three believers, they are actually passive, it is the perfect participle, i.e. “having been gathered” (Newberry). It is the idea of two or three being gathered together by divine agency, i.e. gathered together by the Spirit of God unto His Name. So for younger ones perhaps, who are saved & baptised, but you do not gather with the believers in the local assembly; we would encourage you in this truth of gathering, be sensitive to the leading & guiding of the indwelling Spirit of God, as He would gather together believers into the fellowship of a local assembly who gather to the worthy & authoritative Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

One might ask, ‘Do we base this doctrine all on one verse alone, Matt 18v20?’ One verse alone of the inspired Scripture would be sufficient, but there are other New Testament verses that promise the personal presence of Christ in the midst of the church. In Hebrews 2v12, which is a quotation from Psalm 22v22, the Lord says to God His Father **“I will declare Thy Name unto My brethren. In the midst of the church (assembly) will I sing praise unto Thee”**. So we have His promise to us in Matthew 18, and also His promise to His Father in Hebrews 2; the double promise of the presence of Christ in the midst of the saints when we gather. This is the simplicity and beauty of gathering simply to the Name & Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, and this is really what defines a New Testament local assembly. In 1st Corinthians 1v2, Paul defines a local assembly as he addresses the assembly at Corinth, **“Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, with all that in every place call upon the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord”**. A local assembly, by definition, comprises those saints who gather and **“call upon the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord”**. We do not gather to a creed or doctrine, nor to a place, nor to a human preacher, teacher or pastor, nor to an ordinance, but to a divine Person alone, the blessed Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. To know and believe that at every gathering of the local assembly, we have the inestimable privilege of the risen Christ in the midst. It is His pleasure to take His place in the midst of His own, He loves to gather us around Himself, and thus we gladly claim His presence with us when we come together.

It might also be noted that in the context of Matthew 18v20, the gathering together of the two or three is specifically for the matter of prayer, the

assembly prayer meeting. For in v19 **“That if 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. For where two or three ...”**. We would not say that Matthew 18v20 applies exclusively to the assembly prayer meeting, but it certainly does apply to that gathering. When we gather as an assembly for prayer, to unitedly make our requests known to God, the presence of Christ in our midst makes all the difference, for it gives power & authority to the prayers that ascend to the throne of God. The assembly prayer meeting is not therefore to be regarded as an optional gathering. Some might think ‘I can’t make it to the prayer meeting tonight, so I will just stay at home, and say my prayer for the assembly at home’. Surely for those that are old, frail, sick & shut-in, God will fully honour their prayer for the assembly made at home, in hospital or nursing home. But if we really are physically able to be at the prayer meeting, be clear that any prayer made at home will not have the same power as if it were offered with the gathered saints, and in Christ’s presence, at the prayer meeting. The assembly prayer meeting is a time to gather together with the Lord in our midst, to ask of the Father, and the Lord’s presence in our midst will be honoured by the Father, and we will as companies receive power & blessing from on high to sustain us in our testimony for Him. Notice the language of 1st Corinthians 5v4, **“In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ”**. So when we are gathered together unto His Name, with Christ in our midst, we then will know **“the power of our Lord Jesus Christ”**. Assembly fellowship is, of course, never just to the breaking of bread; fellowship involves all the exercises & responsibilities & gatherings of the assembly.

John 20v19-20:

The Truth of Gathering in Pattern

The Lord in resurrection has already appeared first to Mary, and now the disciples are assembled, these are fearful men, the doors shut “**for fear of the Jews**”. And suddenly & miraculously, the Lord appears and “**stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you**”. His glorified resurrection body was not subject to physical constraints, He had passed clean out of the graveclothes, and clean out of the tomb, and now He miraculously appears in the midst of the disciples, bringing peace to their troubled & frightened hearts. The occasion typifies countless gatherings of believers since, the present gatherings of the saints, when He is in the midst of every gathering. The Church did not, of course, exist at this specific time, the Church came into existence at Pentecost after the Lord had ascended back to heaven. But we have here foreshadowed the pattern of assembly gatherings, with Christ as the central focal point of our every gathering; in v20 “**the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord**”, i.e. literally they saw Him in their midst. When we gather, we are glad to see Him by the eye of faith, because we believe these scriptures that declare it to be so.

The Spirit is careful to tell us in John 20 (both v1 & v19) that this day of His resurrection was “**the first day of the week**”, when the risen Christ thus came and stood in the midst of His gathered disciples. The Sabbath is over, it is the morrow after the Sabbath, the fulfilment of the feast of Firstfruits (Leviticus 23). The Lord thus puts His sanction, as it were, upon the assembling or gathering of His saints on that specific day, the first of the week, to remember Him. The other references to the first of the week show clearly that it was the practice of the early Church to gather together on this day, the first of the week became the formal meeting day of the churches of God. In Acts 20, Paul and his companions are at Troas, and they abode there 7 days, clearly waiting to gather “**upon the first day of the week ... to break bread**” (Acts 20v7). Paul preached that day till midnight, and they departed the next morning, but they did not gather on the first of the week to specifically hear Paul, they gathered to break bread. And this was not merely a local custom at Troas, but it was the pattern of the churches of God. Thus in 1st Corinthians 16, Paul reiterates his instruction previously given to the churches of Galatia, to the assembly at Corinth, regarding the collection for the saints, when they gathered “**upon the first day of the week**”.

In OT times, it was the seventh day – the Sabbath – that was set apart for the worship of God. The importance of Sabbath-keeping is shown by the fact that the 4th commandment of the Decalogue was “**Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy** (consecrate it). **Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work ... For in six days the Lord made heaven & earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it** (consecrated it, set it apart for

Himself)" (Exodus 20v8-11). One might ask, 'are we not expected to keep the 10 commandments today, not in terms of keeping the law to be saved, but as those who are saved, surely we ought not to be breaking the 10 commandments?' Of those 10 commandments, the other 9 are all to do with relationship to God, and moral behaviour towards humanity; but the 4th commandment of keeping the Sabbath holy is primarily ceremonial. In the New Testament scriptures, the spirit of the 9 other commandments is to be found in many places, in the teaching of Christ in the gospels, and the exhortations of the epistles, that we give God first place, we worship only deity, we honour our parents, we display love to all, we do not murder or steal or lie or commit adultery or covet etc. And so, Romans 8v4 "**The righteousness (righteous requirements) of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit**". But nowhere in New Testament Scripture is there any instruction to keep the Sabbath day; rather, there is instruction that all the ceremonial aspects of Judaism were not to be kept. Galatians 4v9-10 "**how turn ye again to the weak & beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days & months & times & years**". Colossians 2v16 "**Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days**".

Is this important? The difference between the Sabbath & the first of the week is immense & fundamental; the one is Judaism and the other is Christianity. The seventh day, the Sabbath of rest, marked the end of man's week of work. But the first of the week does not speak to us of man's work at all, but of a totally new order of things, relevant to the new creation brought in by God, founded entirely upon the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. It speaks to us therefore of human flesh & works set aside as worthless, but our redemption is accomplished in the risen Christ, we glory in the risen & exalted & glorified Man, "**we rejoice (glory) in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh**" (Phil 3v3).

In the Church, we have no links with the Lord before Calvary. There was no Church until the risen Lord had ascended and was glorified at God's right hand. Our links are entirely with a Man who is on the other side of death, risen & exalted in heaven. He is alive, He has victored over death, we remember on the first of the week the risen Christ. Revelation 1v18 "**I am He that liveth, and was dead: and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death**". And if Calvary was a day of shame & sorrow & apparent defeat for our Lord, the first of the week was His day of victory & triumph, when He was fully vindicated, when He was raised by the mighty power of God and "**raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father**" (Romans 6v4). Hence as we gather on the first of the week, the day of Christ's resurrection, it is with triumph in our souls, our hearts delight in the risen Christ. The first of the week becomes so very precious to us, as we enjoy the peace & gladness of gathering to the risen Lord Jesus, with the

knowledge that He is no longer on the cross, the tomb is empty, and we gather to remember our risen Lord.

Thus, at the end of v19, we see the great blessing of this truth of gathering, the peace of knowing the risen Christ in the midst, He says to those troubled fearful men **"Peace be unto you"**. It's the peace that only the presence of the risen Christ brings to us. In v20, the Lord shows them those wounds of Calvary, not His hands & feet (as in Luke 24) but His hands & side. The disciples had seen or knew of three individuals crucified at Calvary; they all had wounds on hand & feet, but John 19 tells us that only one blessed Man had a wound in His side. It could only be the risen Christ who could show them His hands & His side, and it was **"then (or therefore) were the disciples glad"** and immediately enjoying that peace. Fear of the Jews & the outside world had been dispelled, this was their Lord who was risen and in their midst. All their hopes had been centred in Him, and when they saw Him put to death all those hopes seemed dashed. But now, suddenly their whole outlook changes, there is the peace & gladness associated with knowing that the power of death is broken, the peace of His close presence, the comfort of having the risen Christ in the midst. Death has been vanquished, He is alive, all hope in Christ is restored, brought back to life with Him, fear is turned to gladness, peace is brought to troubled hearts & minds. This is **the comfort of gathering with the risen Christ** in the midst.

We must value that kind of peace, derived only from the experience of the risen Christ in our midst. Many things in this world are a potential cause for real fear. But all our hopes for time & eternity are secured for us in the risen Man of Calvary who is alive, in heaven exalted & glorified. It will be fresh appreciation of His risen presence in our midst, in the centre of our gatherings, that will help dispel all fear in relation to this world, and we will know His peace, even in the face of death. That was the experience of Stephen in Acts 7, in that frightening & terrifying experience of being stoned to death, Stephen looked up and saw the risen Christ, **"Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God"** (Acts 7v56), and there was peace for Stephen even as the stones rained down upon him. We need not fear the world, nor the god of this world, for the devil is a defeated foe, our Lord has annulled the power of the god of this world. And as we gather together, with Christ in our midst, we can enjoy the comfort of His peace & His close presence.

But v20 would also remind us of **the cost of our gathering around Christ** in our midst, **"His hands & His side"**, those unique wounds of our Lord at Calvary. It necessitated His death & suffering to fit each one of us for His presence, it required His precious shed blood that we might enjoy gathering with Christ in the midst. Every time we gather to Him, we are caused to appreciate Calvary, and His sacrifice for us, and what it cost Him to redeem us to God. And yet, that immense cost of gathering is also **the confidence of**

our gathering. This was the first time these disciples had ever gathered together on the ground of a finished work. Every time we gather, it is on the ground of the finished work of Christ on the cross, His sacrifice is the absolute confidence of our gathering. We gather knowing that from that pierced side there flowed the blood & water (John 19), the answer to all our need. The blood is Godward, God has been propitiated, divine requirements satisfied by the precious blood of Christ. The water is manward, for cleansing, to cleanse from the guilt of my sins. There at Calvary, God was eternally satisfied & all my need was met by the finished work of Christ, the blood & water from His pierced side, the wounds of Calvary are the confidence of our gathering.

No doubt, when the Lord appeared in the midst of the disciples, every eye was fastened upon Him alone. So too when we gather, we must keep our gaze fixed by faith upon Christ in our midst. Often saints can become discouraged, perhaps cease to attend the gatherings regularly, because when they gather, they are looking only at the rest of the saints, they see all the failings & weaknesses & inconsistencies of the saints, and they feed upon that, and thus become discouraged. If we could but keep our eyes fixed upon Christ in the midst, there won't be discouragement or disappointment, for *'He is not a disappointment'*. There will likely be failures & imperfections in the saints, but there is no failure & no imperfection in Christ who is in our midst. So when we gather, we must keep occupied with Him alone, feed only upon Him, not the saints & their failings, but saturate our souls in the wondrous truth that He is in our midst, and if we do that we will always be encouraged.

And of course with the great privilege of His presence, there comes great responsibility. Our assemblies must be morally suitable for His holy presence in our midst, and we as individual saints who comprise the local assembly each have a responsibility to ensure that this is the case. This is not a matter of outward correctness, but of inward holiness. And furthermore, this truth of Christ as the centre of gathering should greatly influence our attitude, our behaviour, our deportment and our general demeanour & the way we conduct ourselves when we gather. There should be a dignity, an order, a reverence and feelings that are appropriate to the fact that we are gathering with Christ in our midst. There should be a holy calm prevailing if His presence is realised. Our language will not be the language of the world. We won't consistently arrive late for the meetings when we have a deep realisation that the Lord is there; we can't barge into His hallowed presence. It will even affect the way I present myself, for when we gather to be with Christ, as His invited guests, we ought to show the appropriate respect for His hallowed presence in every possible way that we can, even in our external appearance.

2nd Thessalonians 2v1:

The Truth of Gathering in Prospect

In this verse, Paul points us forward to the day when the Church in entirety will finally be gathered around the Lord Jesus Christ, when He comes again to the air; **“Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him”**. What a prospect that is for us, when the Lord Himself descends bodily out of heaven to the air, the dead in Christ are raised, and together with those alive He will draw every child of God to Himself, to gather His own, to gather His Church, together unto Himself. He will then be eternally the object of our affections.

The New Testament Greek word for **“gathering together unto”** in this verse (*episunagoge*, from which is derived the word *synagogue*), in the noun form, is found in the New Testament only here & in Hebrews 10v25, **“Not forsaking the assembling (i.e. the gathering) of ourselves together as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”**. We must all as individuals be greatly exercised and influenced by the knowledge that at every gathering He is in our midst. Such a truth should mean we will be exercised about attendance at the gatherings of the local assembly, and not neglect the gatherings, for every time the assembly gathers, Christ is there. Every gathering is another blessed opportunity & immense privilege to be in His presence, to be where He is, and He is the One who is so worthy of our presence. There will be times when duties of employment and family legitimately prevent perfect attendance, but the bent and habit of our lives should be organised around our attendance at the gatherings of the saints. The saints should be able to depend upon our consistent presence, they should be surprised when we are not there, rather than surprised when we are there. When you get home from work late on a weeknight, and you are exhausted from a busy day of work, and there is the assembly prayer meeting & bible study to attend, the truth of gathering to Christ in the midst makes all the difference in the world!

This word for **“gathering together unto”** is also found in other New Testament scriptures in the verb form; the 1st such reference is in Matthew 23v37, **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen doth gather her chickens under her wing, and ye would not”**. The Lord is weeping over the city, for it had been His desire to gather them together unto Himself, and yet they would not receive Him, they would not have Him, and we see how it broke the heart of Christ. He laments for those who would not gather to Himself. So in the assembly, He desires so much to have His own gathered unto Himself, even to be enjoying our presence with Him. What sadness it must therefore bring to His heart, when believers have little interest in the gatherings of the assembly, & little interest in gathering unto Himself. It must break the heart of Christ to see so many of His own neglecting the truth of gathering to His Name.

And we can miss so very much spiritual blessing & encouragement when we absent ourselves from the gatherings. In John 20, Thomas was not with the other disciples the first time the Lord appeared in their midst; John 20v24 **“Thomas ... was not with them when Jesus came”**. He missed out on tremendous blessing, seeing the risen Christ, and even receiving the Holy Spirit when the Lord had breathed upon the other disciples. Who can know what blessing we are missing, if we are not in attendance where Christ is.

So then, the future prospect of gathering to Him in the air in a coming day becomes the great motivating principle for assembling ourselves together, to gather around His Person today in the gatherings of the assembly. Just as the Lord will be the gathering centre of the raptured Church when He comes, so He is today the gathering centre for us in the assembly. We all long for that gathering in the air, not one of us does not want to be there, gathered around our Saviour, to meet Him in the air, and no true believer will miss that gathering. But really the true measure of how much we feel that, and how much we long for that future prospect of gathering to Him, will only be shown today by how greatly we desire to gather today around His Person in the gatherings of the local assembly. And thus Paul is beseeching the Thessalonians, **“by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him”**.

In conclusion, we must ask ourselves, what is the local assembly all about? Why do we attend the local assembly? How do we decide where our allegiance belongs? Do we gather just to be with the other Christians? The saints are always a blessing, we do enjoy their fellowship & help & encouragement, but the assembly is not a Christian social club. It is not primarily the people we gather with, but it is specifically the blessed Person we gather to. Young believer, grasp this; the local assembly is all about Christ & it is all for Christ. The last recorded gathering in New Testament Scripture is Laodicea (Revelation 3), and it serves as a dire warning, because at Laodicea the door was shut, but with Christ outside the door, **“Behold, I stand at the door and knock”**. That is the general trend of this world’s religion, keeping Christ outside, and it is all heading up towards that coming Babylon system of Christ-less religion. The local assembly must be distinctive, with Christ at the centre of every local assembly, the centre of His gathered people. If we are not motivated by this, it is possible that assembly life will become familiar & routine & ultimately arduous. But the truth of gathering with the risen Christ in the midst will never be arduous. We believe it? Of course, but let us always value it, treasure it, & act in accordance with it, and may the Lord give us all exercised hearts before Him.