

Where Two Or Three Are Gathered.

Text: Mat 18:20

Suggested Hymns:

500, 600, 381, 294, 504

- 1) Where is Christ?
- 2) Christ is where Christians are
- 3) Christ in Worship
- 4) Christ in those who serve
- 5) Christ is with the obedient
- 6) Christ in the waiting heart

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 18:20, ²⁰ ***“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

There are times when in fondest thought a Christian wishes that Jesus had never withdrawn Himself from the human scene and left behind those who love Him. What it would mean to us if only we could see Jesus and talk to Him! How changed our lives would be!

We wouldn't even expect Him to work miracles for us, and certainly we would not expect Him to suffer and die again. All we would ask is that He would make Himself available so that we wouldn't be left feeling alone and helpless.

Such thoughts may be harmless to the Christian, but I also think that the very fact we have such thoughts shows a confused faith. For one thing, such thoughts probably indicate that we are confused about what we believe concerning Christ's resurrection from the dead.

Even though we profess confidence in the reality of Jesus' bodily resurrection, *“on the third day He rose again from the dead,”* as we confess in the Apostles' Creed, yet it is difficult for us to translate that ancient reality into present reality.

In other words, it is easier for us to say, *“Christ rose from the dead and lived”* (using the past tense to describe this miracle) than it is to say, using the

present tense, “*Christ is arisen, and He lives!*” This is one source of confusion that may lead us to engage in such thoughts as mentioned before.

The other source of confusion to our faith on this point arises from the inability of our faith to perceive how the living Christ makes His life known and felt in current experience. It is in this area of your religious consciousness that today’s sermon may help to free your faith of some of its confusion. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Where Is Christ?

The problem of faith, to which I have just alluded, might be phrased in the form of a question. If Jesus’ resurrection means that He is alive forevermore, then where is Christ? And, indeed, this is an important problem to solve.

Obviously, the answer does not involve any search for Jesus’ physical Being. It is not as though someone might sometime discover Jesus living in, hiding in, some remote part of the world. The problem, in that sense, is not a material one.

Nor is the question “*Where is Christ?*” to be answered only by saying that He ascended into heaven. Sitting at God’s right hand with all the holy angels, that is where Christ is. That is perfectly true, Christ is in heaven as well as on earth; and there is no particular difficulty about that.

The difficulty comes to plague us in the form of some of the promises Jesus made before He ascended into heaven, promises which He said would reach their fulfilment after He had gone from this earth to heaven.

Think, for example, of that very well-known promise made a few minutes before Jesus ascended into heaven, the last thing, in fact, He said to His disciples, “*Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.*”¹ That was not the only time Jesus spoke like this, but it surely is one of the plainest statements He made.

Now, what are you going to do with such a statement? And what are you going to make of His statement in our text “*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them?*” And please note that Jesus does not leave any room for doubt here. He does not say, “*I may be in the midst of them,*” but He says positively, “*I am in the midst of them.*” The problem

of where the living Christ is today does seem to present insurmountable difficulties to our understanding.

But at least some of these difficulties diminish if we bear in mind that the promise to be *“in the midst of them”* is given where *“two or three are gathered together in My name.”* This phrase offers a real clue to the problem. It localises it, so to speak. It suggests where we can look for Christ. *“Where two or three are gathered together in My name,”* that is where Christ is.

2. Christ Is Where Christians Are

It appears, then, that all we have to do to find Christ is to find people, even a small number of people, who are gathered in His name. That is right. But where will you find such people, and how will you know that they are *“gathered in His name”*?

I would like to suggest that such people are not hard to find. There are people the world over who love Jesus Christ, who yearn to be united with Him, and who are living for His glory. Of course, people who have such love for Jesus, whose hearts burn with hope concerning Him, are never able to keep their identity a secret.

You know who they are immediately because they worship Christ, serve Him, are obedient to Him, and are waiting for Him. And when you have met up with a Christian, you have also met Christ. For every Christian will cheerfully admit, as written in Galatians 2:20, *it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.*

3. Christ In Worship

For the remainder of the sermon let us think about Christ's presence among those who are gathered to worship Him, serve Him, obey Him, and are waiting for Him. He is with those who *“in His name”* worship Him. This does not necessarily mean that Christ is to be found in every building that goes by the name of *“church.”* We frequently refer to our church building as *“God's house,”* but it is entirely possible that God does not live here.

You see, the thing that makes a church *“God's house”* and that attracts Jesus Christ there is not the style of architecture and not the appointments on the inside. It is not even that there are people inside and a choir and a minister. What is

important in defining a church as a temple of Christ is what the people and the minister are doing there and what is being done to the people and the minister there.

There are two indispensable elements to all Christian worship. One is sacrificial, we offer God something. The other is sacramental, God offers something to us. Both elements of worship must be there if Christ is to be found. What we have to offer God is our best gifts of praise, thanksgiving, a joyous spirit, an open heart, an attentive mind, and a will to confess Him before the whole world. What God has to offer us is the promise of His love, forgiveness, peace, comfort, and holiness.

Every time we open our mouths in the service, the very postures we assume, the way we listen to the readings or the sermon, yes, the frame of mind we bring to church, all this is our sacrifice to God. Every time a word of pardon is heard, every time any part of the liturgy promises to make us the children of God, every time the Sacraments are administered, in all these instances God offers something to us.

Do you begin to understand what takes place in worship? God is confronting you, speaking to you, sometimes warning and pleading with you, sometimes lifting you up and encouraging you. And at the same time God is persuading, and you are responding with your words and thoughts and actions. Unaware you are being drawn, gathered, if you will, in the name of Christ.

Each experience of worship should leave you saying, *"I have been blessed by my Saviour, and I have surrendered my life to Him who is my King!"* But if you want this to be your experience, then remember that you must take what God offers, and you must give what God wants. Faith is required to do both things, but it is only to the faithful that Christ reveals Himself in worship.

4. Christ In Those Who Serve

Again, Christ's presence is to be discovered among those who are gathered to serve Him. It could not be otherwise. In the days of His life on earth you could always be sure to find Jesus where there was some human need.

Perhaps it was in the home of Jairus, where a little girl lay dead. Maybe it was at Jacob's Well, where a fallen woman was thirsting for the waters of life. Or maybe it was along a highway where a blind beggar pleaded for the

restoration of his eyesight. Even out on Golgotha, when a thief was dying, Christ was at hand to fill his last lonely minutes with the peace of paradise.

Undoubtedly that is why Jesus also made so much of a cup of cold water given to the thirsty, as simple an act of charity as you could imagine. And yet Christ said of it in Matthew 25:40, *inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.*

In how much of your serving have you found Christ? For the one who is gathered into the fellowship of His name such services are not insignificant actions. Everything you do, or say, or think, becomes meaningful to Christ, who is present in your life.

There is a story about an old cobbler. A cobbler is a person who makes and repairs shoes and boots. One day he prayed that the Lord would come into his shop. He was a pious soul, and when he rose up from his prayer, he had no doubt that the Lord would come in person. He went to his shop that morning with a song in his heart, and as he swept the floor and began to work at his bench, he could not help thinking that his prayer would soon be answered.

Soon there came a knock at his door, but it was only a little lost girl. The cobbler dried her tears and took her down the lane to her mother. He hurried back to his shop and continued working. After a while there was another knock on the door, and this time it was a poor man asking for food. The cobbler had none at his shop, but he gave the man a few coins with which he could buy a meal. Once again he went back to his work.

Late in the afternoon there was another knock on his door. It was a woman who had fainted there. He called for help, and soon she was on her way again. Soon it was time to close his shop and return home. His disappointment was evident that his prayer had not been answered; and as he lay down to sleep, he sighed in prayer, *“Lord, You promised but did not come.”* And, lo, the answer came, *“I did come. I was the lost child, the hungry man, the sick woman. The things you did for them, you did for Me.”*

It is only a story, of course, but it should help to remind us that Christ is not contained between the covers of a book nor in the walls of a building. Christ is wherever sin creates suffering, hardships, fears, and despair. And there is where you can surely find Him. That is why sacrifice, self-denial, kindness, and mercy,

must always be the characteristics of Christians. For it is precisely when we give the most in His name that we gain the most, for Christ Himself is present and blesses such generosity.

5. Christ Is With The Obedient

Once more, let me suggest that Christ is in the midst of those who are obedient to Him. Scripture says in 1 John 3:18, ¹⁸ *My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*

Let me ask you frankly, *Have you ever really felt Christ's closeness when you did not obey Him and strive to do His will?* The answer to that question is obvious. You know as well as I do that you have known life's darkest moments when you put yourself outside His gracious will. And at times we have all been disobedient.

In the pride of achievement we have sometimes felt that we could get along best without our Saviour. And so we have dared to neglect our prayers. We have hardened our hearts to the need for divine forgiveness. We have grown self-willed, greedy, loveless, and vain.

But even though we have continued to enjoy some measure of success in life with these Christless attitudes and habits, I dare say that we were not really at peace with ourselves. In some quiet hour with some trusted friend we might have been ready to admit how lonely and afraid we really were.

No, Christ will never make Himself known to those who are disobedient. In the very nature of things their disobedience drives Him away. But He will be with His blessings in the midst of those who in His name are determined to follow His commands.

To surrender to Christ's forgiveness, to bow in penitent humility before His cross, to accept His life for yours, with all that that means, both in terms of suffering and in terms of peace and joy, that, my friends, is to find Christ through obedience. You will not know until you have actually listened and obeyed; and once you have obeyed Him, you will never serve another master.

6. Christ In The Waiting Heart

Finally, Christ is in the midst of those who are waiting for Him. The Apostles after Christ's ascension lived in such expectation of His second coming

that they would not have been surprised to see Him cross the street in front of them.

If this seems like an exaggeration, read the New Testament letters, and see how confidently and joyfully the Apostles write of Christ's return to earth. These were the men who were driven in their life and labours by this great hope of seeing Christ again, face to face.

And if we live in that same hope of seeing our Saviour and King again, He will encourage us, too, with His presence. Christ lives, and with our eyes we shall see Him. And if we really believe this with our whole heart, our faith will reveal that He is even now among us.

May we therefore realise that Christ is in the midst of those who gather in His name, worship, serve, obey, and are waiting for Him. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matthew 28:20