

Jesus With His People

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Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 00] Let's turn just for a little to the chapter we read in Matthew chapter 18 and verse 20.

Matthew chapter 18 and verse 20. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

These are words that we use very, very often. We often quote them and words that we're very, very thankful that are given to us in Scripture.

And we often encourage ourselves with these words, particularly if we're maybe in a gathering where there aren't very many people, but we've gathered there with the purpose of worshipping God.

And we've always got to remember that when we do gather together in the name of Jesus, that we have come in worship. And we find here that these words of Jesus have been given in the context where Jesus is speaking about the church.

[1 : 06] And there is one of the things, I suppose, that is so essential with regard to the church. And there's huge emphasis put not only by Jesus Christ, but right throughout the New Testament, is the importance of unity within the church.

And Jesus in this section is highlighting to us essentials for the church and the way in which they are to operate and live together.

And we just look at that very briefly for a minute or two before we come to look at this actual verse. And the first thing that Jesus highlights is the importance of humility.

We find that in verse 4. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom. And for the good of the church, humility is one of the great virtues.

It's probably one of the great problems is that we so often think far too much of ourselves or put far too much importance upon ourselves rather than putting our focus upon the Lord.

[2 : 11] We've always got to remember what the Lord has done in order for us to be here tonight. That were it not for his incredible humility of coming into this world, of being made under the law, of putting himself in the place of sinners, of dying on the cross, and everything that he suffered and endured he did in order that we have the freedom, that we have this ability to worship him.

And it's always important for us to come back and to come back and to come back to the basics and to remember that we are here because of him. And so we must never, ever use the church for our own agendas or our own importance or to make a name for ourself or for any of these things in any shape or form.

But we must always be seeking the glory of God and the good of one another, seeking to build up one another, to encourage one another, seeking for our own growth and seeking for the growth of others.

So Jesus highlights the importance of humility. He also highlights the importance of forgiveness.

We have that, we didn't read right through it in verse 21, the importance of forgiving.

And again, we've got to remember that at the very heart of the Christian faith, there is forgiveness.

And it is something that God does for you and for me over and over and over and over again.

[3 : 50] Part of the Lord's Prayer, forgive us our debts. But we've also got to remember that we ask in that prayer something quite incredible.

We say, Lord, forgive us our debts or forgive us our sins as we forgive others who sin against us.

And that sometimes, that stops us in our tracks sometimes because we are actually saying to the Lord, can you forgive us our sins in the same way as we forgive those who sin against us?

Do we? Are we good at forgiving those who sin against us? Do we grudgingly forgive? Do we say to people, I forgive you, but we don't really?

Or do we really forgive? And it's a very, very important thing because as Jesus is highlighting the importance of the unity of the church, humility and forgiveness are absolutely essentials. Because far, far, far too often in the history of the church, and we're all so aware that the history of the church, if we go right through church history, is full of division.

[5 : 02] And so many of these divisions have been caused because of a lack of humility. Where people, because of their pride, people take a huff because they don't get their own way.

It goes right back. We're not just talking about the day we live in. We can trace it right back. Even Paul writing to the church in Philippi, a church that he loved. There were strains through divisions, people pulling in different directions.

So there has to be humility and there has to be forgiveness. There has to be a sense of an ability not just to tolerate one another, but to forgive one another.

Because it's inevitable that we cannot go through life all the time without sometimes having a collision course.

If we're honest in our own home, we annoy one another at home. We annoy one another. It's impossible. We can't live together without at times causing a little bit of friction, a bit of annoyance.

[6 : 06] It's human nature. It's the way we are. But the way we deal with that is where we're honest and we ask for forgiveness. Where we wrong people.

It's important that we seek to address these things. And that's why Jesus is saying we've got to, for the sake of the church, for the sake of the cause, there has to be humility.

There has to be forgiveness. And then also we see there has to be honesty. Because that's the next thing Jesus says. If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault.

If somebody wrongs you, go and speak to them. Maybe they haven't realized they've wronged you. Maybe they have. But go and see that person. If it doesn't face up to it, then take two or three.

That's what it says. Take between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he doesn't listen, take one or two others along with you.

[7 : 04] And again, we see the importance of trying to establish what has happened and be able to try and reason out. And we've always got to remember that these sort of things, where things have gone wrong, and we notice here that if the brother still doesn't accept or own up to it, then it has to come to the church.

But always the whole aim of it all is always to restore. This is the whole purpose. It's not just to deal with somebody and then get rid of them.

It's always with the aim for the good of the person, of restoring that person. In fact, in Galatians, we're told that in any form of discipline, it has to be done with gentleness.

Consider yourself, we're told there. Because you yourself could fall. It's got to be done with a spirit of gentleness, tenderness, meekness. Not hard, judgmental harshness, but in gentleness.

And so the Lord, you can see his shepherding love and care of the church. And I often wonder what the Lord actually thinks of us.

[8 : 18] When you read about the church where the seven letters were sent to the church in Asia Minor, we get an idea of what the Lord thought of the church there.

And I sometimes wonder what does he think of the church here in Scotland or the church here in Western Isles or the church in Britain or the church in different parts of the world.

I wonder as he looks at us, does he see these sort of things? Does he see honesty? Does he see humility? Does he see forgiveness at work? Does he see people with a desire to protect the church seeking to build people up?

Or is he looking at people who are in it for themselves or seeking to devour? Does he see people with a desire to protect the church?

The word. The word, of course, is always a rule. We cannot misapply the word or bend the word to suit our own notions. We have to take the word as it is.

[9 : 46] And there has to be prayer. And there has to be unity in the prayer. That was highlighted even in the prayers tonight. The importance of unity in prayer.

Of agreeing. And that is why the channels have to be opened. The channels have to be kept clear. And that's why if we come in prayer and we have something against somebody, it's not going to work properly.

The Lord tells us that if we come in prayer and we have something against somebody, before we pray we have got to deal with that. Remember what he tells us in Mark chapter 11.

And if whenever you stand praying, forgive if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

So you see the importance that, as it were, the channels are kept clear. That we, if we have anything against anybody, we need to deal with that.

[10:50] And so we have this here, verse 19. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything, they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.

And as is often highlighted, this word agree is the word where we get our word symphony from. And it's got this idea, and as you know, a symphony that is all this coming together.

All the different parts coming together into making something coming together collectively, beautifully. And that's really how the church should be on earth.

This collectiveness, this togetherness, this harmony, this oneness. And so Jesus is saying, and it's really in there, he's saying, where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among you.

And again how thankful we are for the ever-present presence of the Lord. But it's here in a specific way, it's when his church, when his people come together to pray, as we do tonight.

[11:52] And as somebody said, all over the town, all over the islands, all over our communities, whether it's in homes, small groups and fellowships, whether it's in prisons, whether it's in street corners, just huddled together.

Two or three in the name, in unity, in together praying. What a mighty power this is, because we're told that.

Where, again, I say if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. But we see really the key to this is where two or three are gathered together in my name.

And of course, in the name of Jesus. He shall be called Jesus, for he shall save his people from his sins. He shall be called Emmanuel, God with us. And so it's a wonderful thing to have Jesus present with us.

And we believe that Jesus is present even here tonight. Jesus is present in his roles as prophet, priest and king in his offices. He is here as the prophet of the word.

[12:58] He has revealed himself. Everything we need to know for our good and for our growth and grace and for our development in the Christian faith, it's all here for us.

He is here as our priest. You and I know tonight we are here because of the sacrifice of Jesus. He made sacrifice and he is our sacrifice.

He is also here as our king to rule for us, to subdue our enemies. It's not a wonderful thought. Jesus is subduing the enemies.

He is the greatest enemy of all is the enemy within our own heart. As we're thinking on Sunday. God's great destiny for you and for me, his great purpose is to conform you to the image of his son. It might not be your plan right now. You might have more. They aren't more important plans. But right now they might be so pressing on you. The plans that you have this week or for the remainder of this year.

[14:00] Things that you have to do and they're taking up all your thinking, all your time. But God has other plans. The most important plan God has for you is that you be conformed to the image of his son.

That's what he's doing. That's what he's at work at. And as king, he is subduing these enemies that are within us. And so Jesus is present in all these different offices as prophet, priest and king.

But he is also here with us as our shepherd. And he's here to shepherd us, to feed us, to nourish us, to strengthen us. Because he knows what we need.

And that's one of the great things of the midweek meeting. It's like a filling station. You know, you're traveling along on your journey. Sometimes you get weary. You get tired. You need a little pickup. And sometimes, and I know a lot of you, when you come on a Wednesday night, you're tired. And maybe it's difficult for you to come out. You'd have rather, from a physical point of view, be anywhere else.

[15:09] Because you say, I'm too tired. And you know, often people come out like that and they're so tired. And they say, I don't, I think I'm too tired to listen. But you know, it's amazing. How the Lord has a way of just giving you something.

A little pickup. Might be in the singing. It might be in the reading. Might be in the preaching. It might be in something that somebody says. But you get it because he is here.

He's in the midst. He's come alongside you. So he's a shepherd. He knows what you need. He's here as the great physician. He knows which one of you is hurting.

He knows what's causing the hurt. He knows your needs. Your sicknesses. He knows your battles with temptation.

He wants you to tell. But the thing is, even although you tell him, he knows even more than you actually know. You might think you know yourself. Well, he knows you a lot better.

[16:13] But still tell him. He wants to hear. But he's here as the great physician. He's here almost like the commander of the troops. Coming to see, to examine us.

To see how we are. How we're doing. He's here as our friend. To share with us. To journey with us. You see, fellowship is so important.

The fellowship. We can't underestimate the importance of belonging to one another. You know, we need one another. As I said, sometimes we don't realize that.

But we're so important to one another. And the Lord has given us one another. He gives us. He gives us our friends. He gives us our family. And he gives us our church.

And we are where we are. And there's no point in saying, well, I wish I was somebody somewhere else. I wish it was other people. That we're. We are where we are. And he has given us our friends.

[17:14] He's given us our families. He's given us our people. And it's important that we enjoy the blessings that he has given to us. But he is here as our main friend.

And he wants to journey with us. And he wants to share with us. But as I said, as he looks down upon us, I hope we're not like some of the churches in Asia Minor.

I remember it was at the church in Laodicea. They were saying, oh, you know, I'm doing really well. I'm in need of nothing. Jesus was saying to them, oh, it's a very reverse. You are poor.

And you're naked. You've got nothing. You see, sometimes our assessment of ourselves is not the Lord's assessment. So we need to come back to remembering the importance of the humility, the honesty, the forgiveness, all these things.

And so may we seek to appreciate every time that we come together, whether it is like this just now, or whether it is a more informal fellowship.

[18:22] Wherever we meet in the name of Jesus, in his name, which is the key, he is there. Never forget that. Never forget.

Let us pray. Oh, Lord, our God, we again give you thanks for your never-ending love to us, your patience with us, your grace, which is amazing, for your mercy, which is something that you actually delight in.

Oh, Lord, we give thanks for that great truth, that you are a God who delights in mercy. We pray that you'll be merciful to all of us, and that you'll uphold us and keep us.

We pray that we might be strengthened in the faith, that we might go forward leaning upon you and loving you more and more. Forgive us, Lord, for how slow we are to learn.

Forgive us, oh, Lord, for how quick we are to judge. Forgive us, oh, Lord, for our lack of attention often to the things which you have shown us.

[19:27] But we pray, oh, Lord, that you will be gracious to us and all whom we love. We give thanks, Lord, again tonight for the prayers that we have had for the prodigal, for those who maybe have been brought up well and at this particular moment are in the far country.

Oh, Lord, we pray that you will touch their hearts and remind them of better days and remind them of your love and that you will deal graciously with them.

We pray to bless the church at large, and we pray to encourage every endeavor that is made to spread the gospel throughout the kingdom of God.

We pray, oh, Lord, that your kingdom will truly come. We again remember the persecuted church worldwide, and we pray for those who are in prison, those, Lord, who are being tortured for their faith, those, Lord, who have had their homes broken up, those who are being deprived of work because they love you, those, Lord, who are living in fear, every knock or every noise outside, maybe a threatening noise of someone coming to take loved ones away.

We don't understand the fears that so many people who love you are living under at this time. Oh, Lord, protect your people, and we pray that you will encourage them.

[20:56] And we ask, Lord, that even the persecutors might indeed hear and understand your word, and that many, like Saul of Tarsus, will become Paul's under your grace.

Watch over us then, we pray, and do us good, and take away our sin in Jesus' name. Amen. We'll conclude singing in Psalm 48 from the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 48, and we're going to sing from verse 10 to the end.

Psalm 48. Psalm 48. Verse 10 to the end.

Page 273. O Lord, according to thy name, through all the earth's thy praise. And thy right hand, O Lord, is full of righteousness always, because thy judgments are made known, let Zion mount rejoice.

Of Judah let the daughters all send forth a cheerful voice. Walk about Zion and go round the high towers thereof tell. Consider ye her palaces and mark her bulwarks well, that you may tell posterity, for this God doth abide.

[22 : 12] Our God forevermore he will even unto death as guide. 10 to the end. Psalm 48. O Lord, according to thy name. Amen. Amen. Amen. O Lord, according to thy name, through all the earth's thy praise.

And thy right hand, through all the earth's veins, of righteousness always.

Because thy judgments are in tune, Let Zion's found rejoice Off to the left that no wonder rose Then pour a cheerful voice Walk up outside your land O round the light of the hotel Consider ye that fire is still A mark of the Lord's way

Walk ye with help, O stentivity For this God of the might Our Lord forevermore He will give love to death the sky