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Sermon preached by Mr. F L Gosden at Galeed Chapel Brighton,
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"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." Mathew 18:20

At first sight the text may appear just an ordinary statement, but if the Holy Spirit should open it to us we shall see that it contains heavenly doctrine, gracious experience, the work of the Holy Ghost, and also an exceeding great and precious promise of the Lord's presence among His people. Every word of the text is significant if the Lord by His Spirit would lead us into it.

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name." This was first mentioned by Jacob in blessing his sons. Those blessings were prophetic. He said: "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." (Genesis 49:10) Exceeding precious declaration and this is the same truth: "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." Later in this Gospel we have a warning: "If any man shall say unto you, Lo here is Christ, or there; believe it not." (Matthew 24:23) Well, where is He? The text tells us where He is: Where two or three are gathered together in His name, there He will be; and what a mercy if we are among those that are so gathered!

When John was preaching, most of the people were unaffected; but there were two disciples that heard John, and his preaching was conveyed with power to their hearts, and it had this effect – they followed Jesus. It is well to mark that, not to read it as a distant history, but to take notice of our own cases. You hear the Gospel; what effect does it have? Those two disciples were so affected by it that they followed Jesus, and Jesus turned and saw them following. There was no need for Him to turn, He knew they did, and He said unto them: "What seek ye?" (John 1:38) I wonder if the Lord sees any poor sinner in this little congregation whose heart, whose faith in their heart responds to the Gospel, and they are following Jesus by the inward response of faith, and if the Lord should turn and see one or more here so affected by the Gospel, and following Him. And the Lord said to those two disciples, "What seek ye? They said unto Him, Master, where dwellest thou?"

"Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I." Lord, where dwellest Thou? "I dwell...with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit." (Isaiah 57:15) That is where He dwells. "For where two or three are gathered together" – and this is a very great consolation where it is literally but only two or three, as in many places – and indeed, there might be a congregation and yet be but two or three who are gathered by the Holy Spirit. I remember the late good Mr. Raven said to me on one occasion: "I preached to a great congregation last night." I said to him: "That is unusual in these days." He said: "Yes, but I have reason to know that every one of those possessed the grace of God in their souls; there were only six persons there – great congregation it was!" It is great for one person to be the object of the love of God, the object of His mighty grace in their hearts.

"For where two or three are gathered together in My name" – gathered, not met together – there is a very great difference. I wonder how many here are gathered by the Holy Spirit, and how many

here are just met together? The distinction is important. And perhaps some of you who are exercised and tender and respond to the Gospel, are looking within and wonder whether you are just met or whether you are gathered. "Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be." There is no peradventure in the things of God, and this gathering is of exceeding great importance. There is as much difference between meeting together and being gathered together, as where we read: "Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God." (Psalm 92:13) To be planted in the house of God is a very different thing from merely sitting in a pew; and you will feel the difference, and you will realise the importance of this difference. You look within now. Do you feel, in the exercise of your soul, and the way that you have come along, that you are gathered? And do you feel, putting the same thing in a different form, that you are planted? That the Lord has planted you? That you have an inward root, an inward faith that is attracted by the Gospel, the suitability and the all-sufficiency of Christ in His fulness, so suited to your need as a poor convinced ruined sinner. Sometimes you feel the very roots of your faith moving. I believe, in a little measure, I know what it is. You feel a peculiar, inward sensation of faith when you are led into the green pastures of the Gospel and beside the still waters, the still living waters of the truth; you feel something in your soul striking down, your deep need going after Christ, your poor soul burdened with sin going as to the Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness – "gathered."

That is one reason why I read that 34th Ezekiel, the precious experience of this gathering. It is the Lord by His Spirit that gathers. "As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his flock that is scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country." (v.12-13) Now, that is the work of the Holy Spirit, His work in gathering, plucking a brand from the fire, gathering His people whom He did foreknow. Because in this gathering there is a calling, it is the same thing as calling, and therefore, this people were gathered together before they were given to the Lord Jesus Christ as His bride, given to Him to redeem, and that great truth takes effect: "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37) This is the divine purpose and decrees and councils of Jehovah, which can never be frustrated; the council of the Lord must stand. But He uses means. He could dispense with means, but it is His method; He uses means for the gathering of those whom He has chosen. "Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causest to approach unto Thee." (Psalm 65:4) And the causing to approach is the gathering, the influence of the Holy Spirit that brings them from every place where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. The cloudy and dark day was when Adam fell; and it is a cloudy and dark day spiritually when His people are born, for they are "born in sin and shapen in iniquity." It is a cloudy and dark day in their unregeneracy, but

Preserved in Jesus when
My feet made haste to hell;
And there should I have gone,
But Thou dost all things well.

(Gadsby's 732)

Look within, and do you feel that you have any evidence that you are being gathered? I do feel that it is an important point in the chapter we read: "I will gather them from all places where they have been scattered." And when you look back to the days of unregeneracy, O the places in which you

were scattered! Who could have brought you to a knowledge of your state, to a knowledge of God? The Prodigal comes in here. It was a cloudy and dark day when the Prodigal gathered all up and went into a far country, far away from God. "We all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." (Isaiah 64:6) We should never get back; but the Lord gathered the Prodigal, and He gathered him by a method; and for substance He does this for all whom He gathers. He began to be in want. He was never in want before. He gathered up His father's substance, he thought he was rich and increased with goods and had need of nothing; and he went away in this strength, went away with these riches. But the Lord brought him to poverty. Then he knew that he was poor and miserable and blind and naked. What teaching this is! Gathering. The Lord beginning to gather a poor sinner, and to show him that which Christ declares: "Riches and honour are with Me; yea, durable riches and righteousness." (Proverbs 8:18) He began to be in want. He was hunger-bitten, ragged and wretched; and he was shut up to one thing, he remembered his father's house.

"For where two or three are gathered." What a blessed work this is – a real experience! I press the question again upon myself, and upon you, are you gathered here, or are you just met? Are you planted, have you an inward root, or do you just sit? Great points! "Where two or three are gathered together." "Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be." And there is this in the gathering in the experiencer – the Lord by His Spirit will bring such a soul into the wilderness; that is a radical change. I remember when this world was everything to me; and why carnal reason might have a kind of sincerity in it, if you can be sincere in anything, and say: Well, what more do you want? Look at the pleasures, look at the provision the Devil has made, look at the sports of every kind, look at the entertainments. It is a wonderful thing, my friends, where one has been in the world, for such a work to take effect in them as to make this world a waste howling wilderness, and that together with conviction of sin, not only to see the world a dark, dead place, but to see self in no better condition, the wilderness within: "Death's within thee, all about thee."

O it is a mercy to be brought to ruin in ourselves, to become destitute in ourselves! O this is the beginning of a gathering! And, blessed be God, there is One to whom sinners can be gathered. There is a fulness to which empty sinners may come; there is a righteousness to which the unrighteous may come and be clothed with the best robe. There is a wisdom to which the ignorant may come, riches to which poor bankrupts may come. O the gathering when faith has presented to it this glorious Lord!

"Where two or three are gathered together in My Name." And really, this is the way the Church is built. Whatever assembly there may be, however great – we may meet with a 2,000 congregation – and if the Holy Ghost is not there in the hearts of the people, the Lord is not there. Does it not make the work of the Holy Ghost desirable, precious, essential? And do you not feel the answer of your faith going out after it?

"Gathered." This is to be called. Gathered, and to be called by grace are the same thing, and to be thus called or gathered is the consequence of predestination. "Whom He did predestinate, them He also" gathered, every one of them. "For where two or three are gathered together" – and that will make communion and fellowship. It was very precious for a little while, that to which I referred in the 4th chapter of Ephesians: "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called" – or gathered

– “even as ye are gathered in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” (v.4-6) What a people! What a congregation! What a gathering! But it is in the Word of God, and what is declared in the Word of God we may seek, seek the experience of it. So that these people, every one of them, will, some earlier in life, some in middle life, and some may in later life, but they will be gathered unto Christ in the Gospel and gathered together. “They shall ask their way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.” (Jeremiah 50:5) That is an experience, and that is a part of this gathering, and you will notice they say: “Come, and let us join ourselves” – not ‘Go and meet together’ – but, by being so gathered, so planted, that there might be a real union and contact and joining their souls with Christ, the Living Vine, nothing less will do, nothing less than this gathering which will give that contact. It is a mercy and a mystery that there is vital union wrought by the Spirit in the hearts of His people – a real union, indissoluble union, eternal union with the eternal God the Son – and you will feel it. And where there is that union, there will be contact between an exalted Redeemer and a poor sinner upon this earth. Indeed in Zechariah we read this same text in different language: “I will hiss for them, and gather them.” Why? “for I have redeemed them”. (Zechariah 10:8) Everyone whom He has redeemed, He will hiss for them. To “hiss” is to call them. When men hiss it is in a way of venom, of reproach. But when the Lord hisses it is because He recognises one of His people, He hisses, calls, gathers them. This is the inward work of the Spirit. I can but believe that work in measure is among us.

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name” – some in their experience who have not been brought in the truth. You see it left on record in some of the obituaries; they feel after something, the Holy Ghost has made a disturbance and stirred up their souls, given them a deep wound that nothing but the Gospel can heal, and they begin to feel around. They go first to one place and then to another, until they are caused to pass under the rod into the bond of the covenant, until they come to a place where there is a people gathered by the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost is in the ministry. And what an amazing thing it is when they get there! There is an interpreter there. They need an interpreter, and the sound of the truth by the Holy Ghost enters their hearts for the first time. O how amazing it is!

“Where two or three are gathered together.” And that gathered people will be the same. You will see them gathered from Genesis to Revelation. And there is not a single person different that are gathered here but were gathered in the covenant of grace, and every one of those people – the same, not one different, not one missing – will be gathered together in eternal glory. “Where two or three are gathered together in my name.” “In my name.” It is a mercy religion is not in the memory, or else I should be in despair, but “Where two or three are gathered together in my name.”

The name of the Lord Jesus is just what He is. It embraces the whole compass of His Being. All His divine attributes and perfections are His name. Now if you have that work of the Spirit that has gathered you, it will be in His great name, it will be to Him. You take away His name, and there is nothing to gather to. The lifting up of the Lord Jesus upon the Gospel pole: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,” they were gathered together, sin-stung, sin-burdened souls; they were gathered together in His great name. What was His name as He was thus lifted up? “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.” (John 12:32) “His name shall be called JESUS: for He

shall save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21) "His name is Emmanuel, God with us." (v.23) "This is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." (Jeremiah 23:6) "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6) And these gathered people are gathered inside of that name. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." (Proverbs 18:10) "And they that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee." (Psalm 9:10) O His name is what He is: Jehovah. His name is mercy. It is called Mercy in the epistle of Titus. (ch.3:5) Well, you will feel, as the Holy Ghost reveals Him to you, you will feel that He fills heaven and earth, and what a mercy! O in His name there is divine sovereignty: "If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it." (John 14:14) What a great thing it is, to be gathered together in the great name of Jehovah! If we are gathered together in His name, we have the defence of, and protection of His name. If you go to the throne of grace in His name, you go to the throne of grace under His authority. If you worship, you will worship in His great name.

Worship God, then, in His Son;
There He's love and there alone.

(Gadsby's 789)

I wish I could speak of it, I never shall satisfactorily. I hope I never shall to my satisfaction. No, we see but through a glass darkly, but the sight is attractive, it is beautiful. The knowledge of Christ is like the horizon. You look across the sea where the sky and the sea appear to meet, and if you go by a ship to that spot where it appears to meet, you will find that the horizon is still as far off, and if you go to that horizon you will find that it has receded; and so is the knowledge of Christ, until you are brought into heaven itself, and find that love of God in eternity to be an impassable ocean of eternal and immutable love.

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name." How desirable it is. Do you feel your heart and affection knitting to it? Do you feel that, if the blessed Spirit should so descend upon you and confirm your interest in Christ, to give you to trace His goings, and to remember all the way that He has led you in gathering you these 40 years in the wilderness, and if He would surround you and fill you with the virtue and benefits of His blessed name, that name which is as ointment poured forth, you would not want to go outside again? You would say, Come Lord: "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." I believe this is as much of heaven as we shall know here below, but it is a part of it, it is a part of it.

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." It does not say 'there will I be,' but "I am." And I feel warranted to believe that there are more than two or three in this Chapel gathered together in the great name of Jehovah. If so, the Lord is in the midst of this place, and it will sometimes be felt. Jacob at Bethel, when the Lord revealed Himself to him in that vision, when he awoke, he said: "How dreadful is this place!" (Genesis 28:17) A blessed dreadfulness that was. I hope that dreadfulness will ever be in this place in the atmosphere of it. I hope I shall never lose a sense of that dreadfulness. It is not a terror, it is a sacred awe, by some apprehension of the majesty, the glory, the holiness of God. "How dreadful is this place! this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." O my friends, what a congregation! What a church that is inside of this text! Indeed, the text tells us really the constitution of a real church, where the Lord is, and this promise is her strength: "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early." (Psalm 46:5) I would repeat what I have

sometimes said, and it is well to remember it, that whatever is said to the church belongs to individuals, an individual. You look and see:

Glorious things of thee are spoken,
Zion, city of our God!

(Gadsby's 372)

Well, all those glorious things are spoken to, and belong to every one of His people, and if we read the Scriptures like that it will be a great instruction to us. "God is in the midst of her," and you will say, nothing will satisfy me unless God is in the midst of me, for "she shall not be moved," I shall not be moved, God shall help me, and that right early. What a mercy it is for the Lord to be in the midst of the people in the means that He uses. "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." (1 Corinthians 1:21) It was not necessary for the Lord to ordain the preaching of the Gospel, but it is His method, and He blesses the means; and among other things it is for this purpose: it is for the experience of salvation in the soul. Preaching is a mystery, that God by the Holy Ghost should send a sinful man to preach, and lead him to trace out the pathway and the work of the Spirit in a sinners heart, and thus bring poor sinners to a knowledge of themselves, and a knowledge of the glorious God, and bring that union experimentally into their souls.

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." It will make you feel that you would not be in any other assembly. It may give this peculiar feeling to some poor souls, who may feel that they are outside of that text. But I believe that you would say, there are no other people that you desire to assemble with; you love to meet among them now, even if you are never one of them.

Well, I must just refer to those who felt that in the 56th Isaiah. It says there: "Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the Lord, speak, saying, The Lord hath utterly separated me from His people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree." (v.3) Ah, you may be saying, 'I am a useless thing, and I am a stranger, I am not like unto Thy people.' But the Lord by Isaiah says, "Let them not say it." Why not? "Even unto them" – unto those strangers, unto those odd cases, and unto those eunuchs – "Even unto them will I give in Mine house and within My walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters." (v.5) "The Lord God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to Him, beside those that are gathered unto Him." (v.8)

O may the Lord give to us the witness of His Spirit, that we gather together in His great name, and to have the evidence of it by His Spirit.

Amen.