

# Not Forsaking the Assembling of Ourselves

*The Assembling of the Saint*

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**Bible Text:** Hebrews 10:25

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## **Ballymena Free Presbyterian Church**

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We want to turn to Hebrews 10 and read together a passage in that great chapter. The book of Hebrews the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter and we will commence reading at the verse 11.

And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.<sup>1</sup>

And the Lord will add his blessing to the reading of his own precious and infallible truth.

With the Word open there we will bow in prayer and let's just ask the Lord's help. It is good that we pause that we lift up our souls to the Lord and we seek the help that is greatly needed. And I trust that each believe will pray for that.

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 10:11-25.

*Father, we would cry to thee that the Spirit of the living God will rest upon our gathering here and upon this assembly of people as they now give attention to the Word and to the Scriptures.*

*Oh, Father, speak to every soul. Bring the Word with power and bless us now together around thy truth. We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and for his eternal glory. Amen.*

Verse 25 of Hebrews 10 it says, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”<sup>2</sup>

Our text contains what is the final exhortation of a series of exhortations that are presented by the apostle Paul here in this section of Hebrews chapter 10. And this particular exhortation is that the believer should not forsake the assembly of the Lord’s people.

Now the word “assembling” that is used in this verse comes from a root word that means to gather together. But as it is used here, taking the original language, we find that it is more intensive and it actually means to gather together to, to gather together to. And the stress of the word, therefore, is actually on the fact of a place where the saints gather together. That is the idea that is in view here, to gather together to a certain place, a certain location into a certain building, a place of worship to meet with God. That is what is in view in this word.

And, therefore, we have here a scriptural example of the fact of establishing locations or erecting buildings for the worship of God and for the assembly of the Lord’s people. That practice is found, of course, not only in this word as regards the idea of the word, but it is clearly revealed, of course, in many, many Scriptures both in the Old and New Testaments. And, therefore, as we know in historical Presbyterianism we have that term, “the meeting house.” And it is based upon this whole concept of the instruction of Scripture that there should be a place of meeting, that there should be a location where the saint gather, where they come, to which they bring themselves. And there they meet with their God. It is based on this kind of word and, of course, on many other Scriptures, that very term, the meeting house.

Moreover, when we examine this word “assembling” we will also discover in it why God’s people have had the practice of actually using the word “church” when they speak of the house or the place of worship. And, of course, there are those who would decry that and say, “Well, the church is not the building.”

Well, when we look at this word carefully we find that our forefathers had very good reason for referring to the very building as the church, because here the word “assembling” comes from or is related to the word that is translated synagogue. And you have all read in the New Testament and in the Old Testament the word synagogue. And

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<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 10:25.

the word synagogue means a bringing together. It does refer to the place, of course, where people come together, but it also refers to the people who come together in that place.

You turn over to Acts 14 and verse 43, for example, and there we will see a verse in which we have this idea, Acts chapter 14 and the verse 43.

Notice with me what the verse says. We are only reading part of this verse, Acts chapter 14. It may not be chapter 14, but it is a 43<sup>rd</sup> verse. It is chapter 13 verse 43.

It says, “Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas.”<sup>3</sup>

Acts 14 and verse 43. Notice in that verse that it is stated, “When the congregation was broken up...”<sup>4</sup>

Now the word for congregation there is the word that means synagogue. So notice that. The word for congregation means synagogue. And then it could be read, therefore, this way. “The synagogue was broken up.”

However, it goes on to say this. “The synagogue was broken up.”

And the word for broken up there means literally to loose which means that the congregation was loosed or dismissed. That is the meaning of that statement. When the congregation was broken, up, when the congregation was loosed or dismissed. Now obviously it is not speaking of a building. It is speaking of the congregation. And that is why our Authorized Version translated it that way. When the congregation was dismissed...

But the point is the word for congregation is the same word as synagogue which refers to a building in many, many places. And what do you find here? You find in this very interesting way, that the building stands for the people. And therefore you have the root of the whole idea of which our forefathers have been known of speaking of the building as the church because the building stands for the people in that sense, that it is in that building that the synagoging of the people, the gathering together of the people, the assembling of the people takes place.

So when anyone tells you that you can't use the word “church” in that way, well, you just take them to verses like these and here you find that the Word of God itself uses a word that means synagogue or assembly or gathering together both of people and of a building also and you have, therefore, the biblical precedent for actually using these terms in that particular way.

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 14:43.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

But that is for your own information as regards coming in to the heart of this verse. For it says that we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. That is the real instruction here that we find in this verse, Hebrews 10 verse 25. Wherever we gather, whatever the place might be, the assembling of the saint of God, we are told it is not to be forsaken.

Now the word here forsaking means to leave. And it means more forcefully to leave behind. And, therefore, Paul is referring to a time when a professing believer actually becomes loose with regard to his assembling with other believers even to the point of forsaking or abandoning all together the gathering of the saints and the assembling of the Church. And in these words, therefore, Paul is actually laying stress upon the great danger of personal individual apostasy from the true Church, the time when a child of God or a professing child of God draws back and turns away and leaves and forsakes or abandons the assembling of the saints. He is speaking here in the extreme of utmost apostasy on an individual level when that kind of thing happens. And, sadly, it does happen, when some, as it puts it here as the manner of some is when some who profess the name of the Lord Jesus Christ come to the point where they abandon all together the house of God and the assembly of God and they leave or they forsake the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As I have already noted with you, today, this verse is therefore addressing the matter of faithfulness in attendance upon the place where the saint gathered for worship. Being faithful to that place, to that assembly, not abandoning it as it says here the manner of some is. There is underlined, as I have already said, the sad truth that in the days when Paul wrote this epistle to the Hebrew Christians, there were those who had been guilty of this sin. It was the manner of some to leave, to abandon the assembly of these Christians, these Hebrew Christians. They had gone so far back as to forsake the assembly. They had returned to Judaism. They had gone back into that old dead, defunct religion and had abandoned the assembly of God's people.

And it is in that context that the apostle Paul speaks here to these people. He is addressing people who were actually under intense pressure to leave the assembly of the saints, to turn away from the cause of Christ. And he is warning them that they must not do that, they must not forsake the place of Christian worship. But rather they are to abide faithful to that place and to the cause that is carried on in that place.

Now that is the setting of the words that we find here in Hebrews 10 and verse 25. And the point is established that the Lord's people are to guard against the great danger of forsaking the assembling of the saints. They are to guard against the great danger of abandoning the very place where such assemblies are heard. And that is a point that is always relevant irrespective of the time or the generation in which we live.

Paul here is addressing first century Christians and the danger was there then. We are addressing today 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians and the danger is still just as great that people abandon, that they forsake the cause of Christ, the meeting place itself and turn away

from the Savior. We need to take care, Paul is telling us, that we do not fall into that awful sin.

Now look with me, first of all, at the context of this exhortation. As I said earlier, this is an exhortation in verse 25 not forsaking. It is negative, but it is put that way to really bring stress upon the sense of the words, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. It is an exhortation as we noticed and it is one of a series, as I have already said, of exhortations that run right down through three verses beginning back there in verse 22 where it says, “Let us draw near...”<sup>5</sup>

Notice that. There is the first of these exhortations.

Then verse 23. “Let us hold fast...”<sup>6</sup>

Verse 24. “Let us consider one another.”<sup>7</sup>

And then verse 25, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves.”<sup>8</sup>

It is one of a series, as I have said, and it is found in a very important setting or context. You should always look at the setting of a verse. If you take a particular verse as we are doing today, it is so important to find out the setting of it, the context of it and that is what I want to show you right now. And the context begins back in verse 19. Indeed, it is found in a context that is beginning in verse 19 and it is really strengthened as we go right through the verse 21.

The verse 19 marks the commencement, actually, of the second main part of the book of Hebrews. It says in this verse 19, “Having, therefore...”<sup>9</sup>

Notice the word “therefore.” It tells you that the apostle Paul is now applying what he has just taught, what he has just said. So he says to these people, “Therefore, in the light of what I have just taught,” and what he has just taught comprises the whole of the first part of the book of Hebrews. And he now says, “In the light of what I have just said, therefore, let us do these certain things.”

So here is the context beginning in verse 19. And in verses 19 to 21 there is a summarizing of great truths concerning the person and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ that Paul has just dealt with in the first part of the book. He has just expounded in Hebrews one to 10:18 great truths about Christ. Now he sums them all up in verses 19 to 21.

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<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 10:22.

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 10:23.

<sup>7</sup> Hebrews 10:24.

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 10:25.

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 10:19.

What are those great truths? First of all, the sufficiency of the work of Christ to give us access to worship God. That is what verse 19 is saying.

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.”<sup>10</sup>

Also verse 20, having a new and living way to draw near. What is this summarizing? As I put it, the sufficiency of the work of Christ to give us access to worship God. That is the first great truth that is summed up here.

The second great truth is the position of authority that Christ has over the Church. Look at verse 21.

“And having an high priest over the house of God.”<sup>11</sup>

So the first truth is access to God. The second truth is the authority of Christ over the house of God or over the Church of God. And then the third great truth is the assurance that the one who does approach God upon the basis of the gospel will be accepted.

Look at verse 22 where it says in that verse, “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.”<sup>12</sup>

Now, men and women, brethren and sisters, this is what Paul is doing here. He is saying, “Listen. Here is the sum and substance of what I have just taught from the beginning of this epistle. There is a way to God. There is a high priest over those who come to God. And there is the assurance given to those who do come that they will be accepted.”

Now on that basis he begins to exhort the saints. And one of them is, one of those exhortations is we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together.

Now, think of that very carefully and notice with me that the Lord Jesus Christ therefore died to have a people who would assemble to worship the one true God.

Eventually I want to get to the real exhortation here. We are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. But, men and women, we need to stop and think as I am showing you here of the setting, the context. And the context is teaching us that our Savior died in order to have a people who would assemble in order to worship the one true God.

Do not verses 19 and 20 as we have already read them, express the great truth of the sacrificial death of Christ? Because those verses speak of his blood, therefore, of his sacrifice. They speak of a new and living way made for us into the presence of God. Therefore they are dealing with the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. The focus is on Christ the victim shedding the blood. But the focus is also on Christ the one who actually

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<sup>10</sup> Hebrews 10:19.

<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 10:21.

<sup>12</sup> Hebrews 10:22.

presents the same blood. And, against that background Paul says, “Don’t forsake the assembling of yourselves.”

What is he saying?

He is saying that the Lord Jesus Christ died to have the Church that would assemble.

And what I am showing you, my friend, therefore, is very important. What is the real reason? What is the real explanation as to why we are exhorted as we are right here not to forsake the assembling? The reason is the gospel.

And that may sound very simplistic. It may sound rather strange to say that. But when you understand what Paul is saying here and his argument here you will see that. What is the gospel? The gospel is that Christ died and shed his blood to have a people for himself, a people who would assemble to worship his Father and our God. Therefore the gospel is the explanation as to why we are not to forsake the assembly of the saints. Christ died to have a people for himself.

I draw your mind to that great verse, Ephesians 5:25.

“Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.”<sup>13</sup>

And that is only part of what Paul says there in that section of Ephesians.

Ephesians 5:25, “Christ also loved the church.”<sup>14</sup>

Remember that the word for church also means assembly. Christ loved the assembly. The word church or assembly means the ones called out. Therefore when you think about the very word church itself, the church is an assembly of those whom the Lord has called out of the world upon the basis of the fact that he died for them and he shed his blood for them and he calls them out of the world in order to bring them together to worship God. That is the real idea of the meaning of the word church, one who is called out upon the basis of Christ’s death and bloodshedding that they would come together to worship God.

Therefore the Lord Jesus Christ truly did die in order that there would be an assembly of people who would come together to worship his Father and their God.

The very existence of the church or the assembly of the worshippers of God rests upon the basis of the work of Christ and the death of Christ and the shedding of the blood of Christ. It is by that that there is a church, that there is, that is, a company who will come together to worship the Lord. It is by that death that there is a living assembly on the earth today met here there and yonder to worship the one true God. It is by virtue of his death that there is life among some who come to seek the face of God.

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<sup>13</sup> Ephesians 5:25.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Now, turn to 1 John four and notice how it is brought out there, 1 John four verses nine and 10. It says, “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.”<sup>15</sup>

Notice here the emphasis on life, the believer having life, spiritual life, eternal life, living through Christ. But notice that it is based on the fact that God sent his Son and when he sent the Son what happened? Well, read verse 10 and you will see.

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”<sup>16</sup>

Notice the build up of terms here. Christ was sent. Christ came to deal with sin. What is the result? We live through him.

Therefore Christ died to produce eternal life for an assembly of people, a great company of people for that matter, but a people who will come together to worship God. And never forget that.

Now that tells us very, very clearly why there cannot be a church assembly where there is a Christless theology. And there are many places like that today. They have come together supposedly to worship God in this very land, in this very town. They are going through the motions. But all the while there may be a man in the pulpit or there may be a theology that is embraced by that church that denies Christ’s person, that they blaspheme the Son of God and call him a mere creature and give the idea that his sacrifice of the cross was nothing more than the death of a martyr.

There is no saving value and the blood, oh, they scorn the blood and they despise that belief, that teaching, that theology that does make much of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, I tell you, men and women, today, there is no church there because Christ the eternal Son of God who became man gave his life, suffered on the cross, shed his blood that there might be an assembly. Therefore, this exhortation lies in a context where the gospel is proclaimed and where we are shown that it is because of the gospel that there is a church.

Now, I could expand that and I have done that in my notes and I will just deal with a few things before I get into the very heart of this exhortation. Christ died not only to have a living assembly, but Christ also died to provide a foundation for approaching God in our assemblies. We see that here as well, having access through the blood. Christ therefore died that we might be able to draw near to God in our assemblies, in our gatherings in a church service. That is what we are doing today.

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<sup>15</sup> 1 John 4:9.

<sup>16</sup> 1 John 4:10.

We have come to this place to draw near to God. I trust you have for that is our purpose.

But notice this, men and women, that we draw near to God upon the basis of the blood. May I just remind you of what the Lord taught Moses? Because it illustrates this point. God taught Moses to build the tabernacle, set up in the very holiest of all the ark with the mercy seat. Once a year have the high priest go in with the blood and sprinkle it on the mercy seat.

And he says, “There I will meet with thee between the cherubim. I will commune with thee. I will speak with thee.”

What was being taught to Moses? This great gospel truth, that Christ would die, shed his blood to provide the foundation for entrance into God’s presence to assemble before him, to worship him.

Christ died to have a church, to have an assembly. Christ died to give them the way of access in their assemblies to worship God. Christ also by his death has the authority to be the high priest over that people. Did we not read in verse 21, “Having an high priest over the house of God”?<sup>17</sup>

And how important that is when we come to assemble even in this manner this morning, that there is a great high priest presiding over this assembly? And thank God he is.

Let me tell you, men and women, I am not the president of this assembly, to use that term. It is Christ by his Spirit. And if there is any man who is president it is not a church. It is just a social gathering. It is just a human organization. But the Lord Jesus Christ as the high priest over the house of God and I tell you today we need that because as our high priest he mediates. And what does he do in being our mediator? He brings us nigh.

We have come to assemble. We have come to worship God, but how can we do so but for the fact that our great high priest brings us near? He assists us by his Spirit. He enlightens us by his Word. He preserves us by his intercession. And he encourages us by the sacrament that he has instituted, the Lord’s supper and baptism. These are the actions of the great high priest who has been given to God’s assembly that we might be able to come to God. He has the authority and he alone to act in that particular way.

And then may I say this because this is also very important? Let me just remind you what we are doing here. We are looking at the setting here. Why is there this exhortation?

“Don’t forsake the assembling of yourselves.”

It is because of the gospel and the gospel proclaims Christ died to have a church, an assembly. Christ has provided the way of approach when we do assemble. Christ is the high priest who mediates over that assembly, assisting, encouraging them. But remember

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<sup>17</sup> Hebrews 10:21.

this, men and women. Christ also died that his people would have a basis to come together in union as one person. And that is also very important. And that is brought out here by inference at least in these words.

It says, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves.”<sup>18</sup>

It is the assembling of men and women. It is an assembling of believers and they are able to come and assemble as it is described here, why? Because they are in union with each other through the merits of the death of Christ.

I want you to turn to Ephesians chapter two. This is here by inference, that is, that Christ died to provide a union between believers who do assemble.

So I want you to turn to Ephesians two. It is here by inference in Hebrews 10, but I want you to go to Ephesians two where there is a passage that is wonderful in its meaning and in its teaching and that brings this out in such a marvelous way. Ephesians chapter two verse 14. Read with me. Pay heed to it.

“For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us.”<sup>19</sup>

We will stop there. We don’t need to read any farther for the sake of time, but even for the sake of being conclusive right here, this verse says, verse 14, “He made both one.”<sup>20</sup>

Now who is that? I remember reading this verse in years gone by as a young believer and I was convinced that Paul is talking here about God and men. He made both one. But he is not. He is talking about Jew and Gentile. That is what the passage is all about.

You have to read the previous verses. Paul says to these Gentile Christians, “You once were far off. You were strangers from God and the covenants of promise and the commonwealth of Israel, but now you are made nigh by the blood.” And then he goes on to expand on that in verse 14.

Christ hath made both one.

And that is his great argument right down these verses, that the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile is broken down and there is now only one body, one church, one redeemed company.

And what am I showing you hear? I am showing you, men and women, what Hebrews 10 shows us. Christ died to bring people together to worship God.

Now we hear a lot today about getting everybody together. Ecumenism has permeated

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<sup>18</sup> Hebrews 10:25.

<sup>19</sup> Ephesians 2:14.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

all society. It is the thinking not only in church circles, it is not only the philosophy there. It is in politics. It is everywhere. This cry, “We are one, we have got to come together and we have got to stand together,” and all the rest of it, it is the very basis of the false peace movement so called right here in this province. It was spawned in ecumenism’s womb. It is false because while we read in the Bible that Jews and Gentiles come together, there is a foundation and that is the work of Christ in the gospel. They wouldn’t come together otherwise.

it is a marvelous thing, you know, to look over a congregation as I have done in the past and see sitting in the congregation as I did in Malvern all kind of nationalities. Now, I don’t know if there are any foreigners here. I think we are all Ulster men and women. Oh, I have a few American children sitting here, but anyhow, that is those born in America. But anyhow, that is by the way.

As I looked over that congregation and see black and white, to see I can’t remember any longer how many nationalities represented. Irishmen, that is people with a southern Irish extraction, Ulstermen, a few of them, Ukrainian, German, Italian, Colombian and even more that I say, I can’t recollect right now. What a marvelous thing it was to see that, because while these verses are speaking of Jew and Gentile, they can be expanded out because among the Gentile nations of the earth you have all these nationalities. And there they were sitting together, worshipping together, praying together, praising God together, looking forward to going to glory together.

Why? Because Christ died to give them a union. That is real union. That is real ecumenism.

You know, the word ecumenism is a biblical word. Ecumenical comes from one of the words in the New Testament that is translated “world.” And that particular word for world means one world. And the enemy has taken it, a New Testament word, a perfectly legitimate word and they have used it for an evil purpose.

The only real ecumenism that is recognized in heaven is the association of believers from all nations under heaven, brought together in the one great company by the blood of the Lamb through the gospel of Christ and who one day will be presented as one company before the throne of grace.

That, my friend, is the basis of what Paul is saying here when he says, “Do not forsake the assembling of ourselves together.” It is based on the great fact of the death of Christ and all that that means. And that is so important.

The gospel provides the foundation for our assembling together. As I have already said, there would not be any true Church, there would not be the possibility of meeting together honestly, there would not be the actual situation where people from all nations could come together and worship the one true God if Christ had not died. But thank God

he has died. And as he says in Matthew 18 and 20, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”<sup>21</sup>

But the emphasis, as I quote the verse here at this point is on that. “In my name.”

What does that mean? It means on the basis of who I am and what I have done. That is the foundation for the assembling of the saints. We gather therefore depending on his merit.

Now, come to the command that is in this exhortation and look at the context. Look quickly. Look with me at the command here.

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.”<sup>22</sup>

As I noted with you, God’s people are God’s Church. They are the Lord’s assembly because of the work that Christ has done for them.

Now that is a great privilege. It is a privilege that we cannot fully estimate or value, to be one of the company for whom the Lord die and whom he has brought out of the world. Oh, what a marvelous privilege that is, what a tremendous blessing that is. But, men and women, what a tremendous serious responsibility it brings upon those who are the recipient of such a privilege. Oh the great responsibility indicated here by this exhortation and on many others, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.”<sup>23</sup>

May I remind you that this is essentially the command of Christ? It was written by Paul, but by Paul as he was inspired by the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit, of course, moved Paul to write this Scripture at the instruction of the great prophet, Christ himself because he is the great prophet who has given us the entire Bible. And, therefore, the Holy Spirit went forth and he moved Paul to write this and, therefore, being by the Spirit and coming from the heart of Christ, this is Christ’s command. Think about it that way.

So often when I stand in the pulpit and encourage you to come to the services the danger there is that you only hear it as the word of a preacher or a minister. You don’t recognize that that is the command of Christ, that you shouldn’t forsake the house of God and be at the meetings. You should be there. That is the command of Christ. And I want you to see that there. Because that tells us that the Lord himself delights in the assembling of his people.

I think as we see it that way it will help us, not only to understand this passage, but to take to heart its exhortation, to really see that since the Lord delights in the assembling of his people, then it should be our delight to be there. If we understand it that way, then we will delight to be where God’s people are, because there Christ is.

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<sup>21</sup> Matthew 18:20.

<sup>22</sup> Hebrews 10:25.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Remember we read or I quoted Matthew 18, “For where two or three are gathered together,” even the smallest assembly, “in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”<sup>24</sup>

The emphatic promise that the Lord will be there. And the inference is that the Lord delights to be there with his redeemed ones whom he bought with his blood, with the congregation who is the apple of his eye.

And, my friend, that is true. God’s people are the apple of the Lord’s eye. And he delights to be there when they gather together with his bride. To him, oh, she is beloved. She is fair.

Men and women, we are part of this great company of the redeemed if we are saved. You who are saved in this gathering right now, you are part of that bride. And in the eyes of Christ you are fair. You are all together lovely. I know that to us is incredible if we know our own hearts and are conscious of our own sin and unworthiness.

But, oh, my friend, the Lord has a delight in his people and he, therefore, has a delight in their gatherings. There is no gathering on the face of this earth that brings delight to the heart of Christ but the gathering of the saints.

That is a good test of where you should be and with whom you should associate.

Let me tell you something. The Lord has no delight in assemblies of people at the dance hall, in the cinema, spewing out its filth, in other places of worldly kind. You make no mistake about it. The Lord has no delight in those gatherings.

But where you have a few believers even only, meeting around the Word, loving the Lord Jesus, despised by the world, unknown, though that doesn’t mean anything anyhow. The Lord delights in them. He delights in his Church. He joys over them with singing as it says in Zephaniah.

What a tremendous verse that is, Zephaniah 3:17. “The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy.”<sup>25</sup> Listen to this. “He will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.”<sup>26</sup>

Can you imagine anything more incredible than that, that today as the Lord looks down on us gathered here in Ballymena, he is actually rejoicing over us with singing? And over every other company of people who are endeavoring to be faithful to him and to his Word. He joys over us with singing because we are his.

No, my friend, that should, in turn, [?] of our souls a delight in being with those over whom the Lord dies. It works that way. And though I cannot understand how any true child of God is reticent or reluctant about being with the saints, that is, as often as is

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<sup>24</sup> Matthew 18:20.

<sup>25</sup> Zephaniah 3:17.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

possible, I can't understand how any child of God can do with a Sunday morning only experience.

My friend, I am sad for you if you are content with that. I trust today that you will see that the Lord loves to be among his people and does come among them and delights in being there and commands them, therefore, as we have here. And when I know that I want to be there as well.

I read of Thomas who missed the gathering that Sunday night and oh what blessing he missed because the Lord came near and showed them his hands and his side and Thomas missed it.

How many there are who forsake the assembling of the saints on the sabbath night.

My friend, you are depriving yourself of so much, the blessing, the delights that others have.

The Lord not only delights to be there, the Lord obviously desires the assembling of his people. And I want you to understand this and follow this very carefully.

Why does the Lord desire the assembling of his saints? He does for this is his command.

“Don't forsake the assembling...”<sup>27</sup>

The inference is, do assemble. Therefore he desires it.

Now why does he desire it? And the answer is simply this. It is through the assembled Church that Christ is made known to an ungodly world.

Have you ever stopped to think about that? What is the only way, by what means alone will the Lord be made known in this wicked world if it is not through his Church gathering together? That is the only way.

Now turn over to Ezekiel 20 for a moment or two, Ezekiel 20 and look with me at verse 41. It says, “I will accept you with your sweet savour.”<sup>28</sup>

This is a marvelous verse. You should not only read it with me now, but take it home and mull over it.

“I will accept you with your sweet savour.”<sup>29</sup>

There is the sacrifice.

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<sup>27</sup> Hebrews 10:25.

<sup>28</sup> Ezekiel 20:41.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

“When I bring you out from the people.”<sup>30</sup>

There is the Lord bringing his people out from the world.

“And gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered.”<sup>31</sup>

Now I know that initially this was written to the Jews, but leaving that aside right now there is a spiritual principle here. The Lord gathers his people out through the sacrifice, through its savor. And what does it say at the end of this verse, verse 41?

“I will be sanctified in you before the heathen.”<sup>32</sup>

Notice what God is saying here. He says, “I am going to bring you out. I am going to gather you together through the sacrifice. There is the cross again, you see.”

And here is the reason.

“I will be sanctified in you [or through you] before the heathen.”<sup>33</sup>

Now what does that mean that the Lord would be sanctified? The word sanctify means to make holy. It simply means that the Lord will be known or will be declared to be the holy God that he is when he has a gathering of people in whose lives are his holiness and godliness and they come together in their assemblies to worship him. Then the world knows something at least or is being shown something at least that God is and God is holy, God is righteous.

He actually says here that through his gathered people he will be sanctified. He will be made known to be true righteous God.

Now I know that you may say, “Well, it doesn’t really work.”

It is not for you and I to start to analyze the results, the impact, the consequences. We might feel, well, gathering on the sabbath or any other time, what does that say to the world?

God is telling you it says something at least. Now you think about that, dear believer. And remember this. For this to be the case his people must not be negligent. They must not be careless concerning their assemblies.

Let me put it this way. There is nothing, perhaps, will speak more in your neighborhood than you as a family Sunday morning, Sunday evening leaving your home, getting into your means of conveyance, ready to come to the house of God and going to the house of

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

God. You have no idea how much that will speak. If it does nothing more, it will do this. It will condemn your ungodly neighbors now and on the day of judgment because you are sanctifying God before the ungodly and in obedience to Scripture. And that is undoubtedly going to make an impact.

Oh, you may not see it at this point in time, it will have a consequence. It will have a bearing. And therefore surely the point that is being made here in this command is that the Lord desires that his church gathers in a structured, disciplined, diligent, faithful, godly manner. This is what the Lord is saying here.

Remember this. He is the head of the Church. He commands the Church, “Don’t forsake the assembling of yourselves together.”<sup>34</sup>

What is a church?

Let me give you the answer to that. A true church exists where there is the faithful preaching of God’s Word, where there is the administration of the sacraments and where there is also the proper administration of church government and church discipline. That is a true church.

Let me say this to you, my friend, it is the will of God, the will of Christ that all who are saved publicly identify with such a church. That is the will of our Savior. Furthermore, it is the will of Christ that you do not forsake the assemblies of the Church.

Now you think through that logically. Is your testimony right now as a child of God that when the Lord saved you, he effectively called you to be part of his church and, indeed, in the sense of the Church of the first born. He made you a part of that church if you are a real child of God. When the Lord called you to himself he did that, but he did something more. He called you to take a public identification with the Church of Jesus Christ on earth. He called you to that. That is the will of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That means if it is your testimony that the Lord called you in saving you—for that is the way it is if you are saved—he did call you to be part of his Church publicly. And since that is true, that means that he called you to submit to his will and to his authority with regard to the functioning of his Church and the assembly to which you believe the Lord has called you which means that you forsake not their gatherings, that you forsake not their prayer meetings, that you forsake not her communion services, that you forsake not all other gatherings for fellowship. That is the logical as well as the scriptural conclusion.

I find it very sad that many believers have a very poor view of Christ’s Church. In many cases it is like a convenience, somewhere to go on Sunday morning only or maybe at a few others times because, well, that is what a Christian is supposed to do. And that is their view of the Church.

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<sup>34</sup> Hebrews 10:25.

Now you may have that view and have it because of a lack of understanding. Well, we will just say no more. That may be the reason. You just haven't understood this before.

Well, I trust that you have understood something more clearly this morning. I repeat it. You are a child of God. That means the Lord called you not only to himself, but into union with other Christians. He called you to assemble with other Christians. He called you to be part of that company and publicly identify with that company and support the cause of Christ witnessed in that company. That is the will of God because that is the teaching of Scripture.

Now we are on the threshold, as we say, at this time of the year, with the holiday season behind us, we are on the threshold of a new season. Brethren and sisters, the will of Christ for you is this, not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together. And if every believer here this morning who is in his heart or her heart recognizes this is my church, this is where I belong, this is where I want to be because God has led me here. It is the will of God for me to be here. I am being fed here and I trust you are. If that is your testimony, go beyond that, Christian. And this incoming season and year never, never dare to forsake the assembling of the people of God.

I have given you the context and really the foundation for this exhortation and I say to you it is a very solemn thing. Christ died for all this to be. How dare we treat lightly the assemblies of the saints? How terrible when it comes to maybe a Sunday night and you are sitting in the corner.

I am not talking here about people who may be incapacitated in some way or other, but people able, well and healthy and strong sitting in the corner, desecrating God's day in one fashion or another, the visitors in, tell them stay at home if you have to. Tell them this is God's day.

If you want to see us, you are quite welcome, but not on Sunday evening.

Will you take a stand, my friend? You need to get your family out under the Word of God. And you need to forsake this sin because it is a sin, to leave the assembly of the saints, not serving the Lord throughout his day or other times when God's people assemble.

Oh, how solemn this is.

But let us see it, men and women, from the perspective that we are encouraged. The Lord will delight in our being there. We will be blessed. Oh, that you will catch that. Because I fear this morning that it is your situation where you could not care less then you become negligent. There is something wrong in your heart. You have lost out with God. You are now in a backslidden state. And it may only be inwardly, but really as you think, but really it is now an outward thing if you have no heart for the cause of Christ.

It is not my purpose today to guilt people. I don't believe in that. But there are times when it is my purpose under Christ to admonish and rebuke and tell you that this is sin. It needs to be repented of.

May God give you grace and may we see his Word coming with power to our hearts for his own glory.

Let us bow together before the Lord. We will just close our meeting with prayer. And let us all solemnize before the Lord by his grace that we will do his will and we will not forsake the assembling of the saints.

*Oh Father, use thy Word we pray. Speak to each one of us who know thee. Oh, Lord, give us a heart and a delight in meeting with our God. Oh, Father, give us desires that even Christ himself has and, Lord, whenever it may be, may thy people flock to the assembly to meet with their God to do business with him. Hear us. Answer us today. Speak to those in this gathering who are not part of that true assembly, but are yet in their sins. Oh Lord, deal with them and bring them unto Christ and save them by thy grace. Abide with us now and bless us today for all of this we pray in our Savior's name and for our Savior's sake. Amen.*