

Christ: God's Appointed Centre of Gathering for the Universe of Bliss and Glory

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He must ever be the Centre, whatever the circumstances, whatever be the disposition towards Him of whosoever may be involved: we repeat, He must ever be the Centre. Knowing Who He is we are not amazed that this should be so. "In Him was pleased to dwell all the fulness" (Col. 1: 19). Also, "He is the Head . . ." hence "in all things He might have the pre-eminence" (Col. 1: 18).

The Holy Spirit delights to draw attention to Him in a variety of circumstances and to emphasise to us that the central place is naturally His. If it be with the learned doctors of the law, He was "sitting in the midst of them, both hearing them, and asking them questions" (Luke 2: 46, 47). Little wonder that "all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers."

If it be in the Pharisee's house — whatever the intention of Simon in having Him there — the woman of the city which was a sinner, will mark Him out in the pre-eminence of His forgiving grace. When crucified, betwixt two malefactors, hatred would further degrade Him, we read "they crucified Him, and two other with Him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst" (John 19: 18).

Then on that day of resurrection power and triumph, when the surprised disciples were gathered together, "came Jesus and stood in the midst" (John 20: 19). Later, awful declension having set in amongst those who professed His Name, we see Him walking — albeit in judicial character — "in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks" (Rev. 1: 12, 13). A yet far happier sight John saw, "I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne . . . stood a Lamb as it had been slain."

In that Lamb, the acknowledged centre of the world to come, we recognise Jesus. Once the centre of shame and suffering upon the cross, He is acclaimed, in the answering glory, as the centre of God's universe of bliss! (Rev. 5: 6, 9). Ample indeed, is the testimony of the Holy Scriptures to the grand fact that Christ, once despised and rejected of men, is to fill the highest station and there to be acclaimed by all! Every knee must bow before Him, every tongue must yet confess Him to be Lord of all! (Phil. 2: 9-11).

Time was, when, having presented Himself in lowly grace as Israel's long promised Messiah, His own people received Him not (John 1: 11). How blessed, though, to learn from the inspired Word, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power" (Psalm 110: 3). Even as far back as Genesis 49: 10, Jacob had prophesied, "Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be." Again, Isaiah plainly intimates "In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek; and His rest shall be glory" (Isaiah 11: 10). He is the appointed Heir of all things (Heb. 1: 2). All things in heaven and in earth shall be gathered together in one, in Him (Eph. 1: 10). He is the Head over all things (Eph. 1: 22).

The day too, is coming — how soon we cannot tell — when all who form His Assembly, shall hear His voice calling them to join Him where He is in glory. In the powerful attraction of the love which then shall speak, all together (sleeping saints raised, living saints changed) shall leave this world and be gathered unto Him — the largest Assembly meeting of all time!

Let us remember that He Who stooped so low as to taste death for everything will, in consequence of His having been lifted up at Calvary, draw all to Himself. He will then be the admired Centre of a universe in which the rights of God are established.

So much then for the future, the outlook is certainly bright. Christ is to be publicly set forth in

power and great glory. The universe which has witnessed His awful loneliness and suffering upon the cross of Calvary — when all forsook Him and fled: when God abandoned Him in His hour of unparalleled suffering — that hour of His being made sin as a sacrifice for sin — shall witness Him among the holy myriads (Jude 14).

Israel will then hail Him with joy: the Gentile nations too will bow at His feet (Psalm 72: 17-19). "Angels and men confess Him then when He in power shall come again." But nearer than angels, Israel, or the Gentiles shall be the favoured unique company — His Assembly, "The fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1: 23).

Every heart which loves Him surely cries,
"Lord Jesus come, and take Thy rightful place
As Son of Man, of all the theme!
Come Lord, to reign o'er all supreme,
Lord Jesus, Come!"

But while we consider this great and glorious prospect let us face the present implications of this longing that Christ should have His destined place as the gathering Centre for all in the world to come.

As we look upon the sphere of profession in this present world are we not made sadly aware that the general conditions are not indicative of Him having His true place as the only Centre for gathering to the Assembly of God. That He is such, the Scriptures definitely teach. While He took that place in the midst of His own on the day of His resurrection from amongst the dead, we do learn that such is His proper place. Hebrews 2: 11, 12 so plainly declares, "For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one; for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare Thy Name unto My brethren, in the midst of the Assembly will I sing praise unto Thee."

The true and outstanding feature of the Assembly locally, and everywhere, is that He is owned as the alone Centre of gathering.

As the apostle Paul took sad account of the divided state of the gathering in Corinth he besought the saints in these words, "Now I beseech you brethren by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." (1 Cor. 1: 10). Christ is God's gathering Centre for the Assembly now. The acknowledgement of His Name will search every heart and conscience, confirming what is of Himself, but condemning all that is contrary. Hence, the apostle went on in 1 Cor. 5, to instruct that true dealing with evil must be exercised by them as gathered to His Name. What is due to His holy Name must be maintained amongst us.

Being gathered to His Name means that He is absent, and why? He has been rejected and crucified here. And we, being gathered to His Name, are identified with Him in His rejection. Of necessity then we cannot allow amongst us the principles or practices of the world which has crucified Him.

His Name covers the whole truth of His Person. This being so we will so treasure what Scripture teaches as to Him as to refuse those who do not bring the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9-11). We will guard against the intrusion of any denial of eternal relationships in the Godhead. We hold the truth of the incarnation of the Son and resolutely refuse the teaching that He became Son in incarnation. While gathering to His Name alone it must be to Him as Scripture presents Him. Indifference to Christ cannot be tolerated where His Name is owned.

May we be kept, then, from all that which threatens the faith in this our day. We may be shunned, looked down upon with pity, but *He* was crucified! May we welcome the opportunity to bear His reproach. With it, thank God, there is the compensation of honouring the Son. Is it not well that He should be honoured by us now, where the contrariety and opposition is? There will be none such when we are with Him in the Father's House on high.

"Christ also loved the Assembly, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself an Assembly glorious, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5: 25-27). Just like Himself! Spotless, ageless, blameless. Praise Him for evermore!