

God Come to His Gathering

by Dennis Kinlaw

God desires for His people to come together to experience the power of corporate worship and to be transformed by His presence.

Duration: 32:13

Scripture: Genesis 12:1-3, Exodus 3:1-4, Exodus 19:1-20, Matthew 18:20, Mark 8:31, Acts 2:1-4, Galatians 6:16

Topics: "God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal experience of attending a Billy Graham crusade and being moved to come forward and accept Christ. He emphasizes the power of believers coming together in worship and seeking God, as it creates a unique presence and possibility for transformation. The speaker also highlights the importance of time in God's plan, noting that while eternity is significant, there is also a great interest in history throughout the Bible. He mentions the impact of old-fashioned revival meetings, where communities would set aside time to worship and meet God, leading to potential transformation through the word of God.

Transcript

A very brief text for tonight. The book of Acts chapter 2. When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Shall we bow our heads together for a moment of prayer? Our Father, we want you to remind us tonight how privileged we are that we have the opportunity of being in your presence.

We thank you that you have given us a promise that if two of us meet together in your name, before we finish, there will be an extra person there. In fact, the reality is that if we come together in your name, you're there before we start. We're never first.

We thank you for that. Now give us openness to hear what you have to say to us tonight as we begin these days together. We pray in Christ's name.

Amen. One of the great things for Christians is the fact that we have a full Bible. Occasionally you will find Christians who call themselves New Testament Christians.

And in my younger years, I thought that was a noble ideal. Certainly the New Testament represents the latest part of God's revelation and the fullest statement of God's truth. And so when I would ride through the South and see on a bulletin board out front of the church, a New Testament church, I would think, now

those must be good people.

But you know, as the years have passed, I've come to believe that there really should not be any such thing as a New Testament Christian, that we ought to be biblical Christian. Because the church of Jesus Christ, that church of the New Testament was founded without the New Testament itself, because it was founded on the Old Testament and the ministry of Christ and the apostles, and then they gave to us the New Testament. Now I don't want for a minute to imply that the two are in any sense opposed to each other.

They are a work of God and a single work of God that he has given to us. And there are many things in the Old Testament that are necessary to make the New Testament really comprehensible to us as it needs to be. We need to be fully biblical Christians.

Now there was a custom in the Old Testament that we do not keep in our midst, but when God gave it, he gave it as a command to the people of God in the old covenant. And that command, interestingly enough, was that three times a year all of the Jews ought to get together in one place, particularly as the city of Jerusalem became their center in the city of Jerusalem. And God established, you will find it in Exodus, you will find it in Leviticus, you will find it in Numbers, you will find it in Deuteronomy, you will find it listed in many of the other books of the Old Testament.

You will find the references to the great festivals of Israel and particularly the three where every Jew was supposed to come together with every other Jew to worship the God of Israel. And it's interesting that that's what these disciples were doing in Jerusalem when the text that we read a few moments ago took place. They had come together for the second of those great festivals, the Feast of Weeks, known as Pentecost.

They had come together because God had called them to come together. Now why was it that God said to his people in those days when they didn't have a lot of other things to help them in their spiritual lives that they should make great sacrifice and travel great distances for them because they had no means to travel except by foot and animal, go to great sacrifice and personal expenditure of energy and time to come together that way? I don't think there is any question but that you and I in our better moments know that there are some things that God can do for us when we are together that he cannot do for us when we are separated and when we are individually on our own. There is a certain potential in a corporate group of people worshiping God that is not there in the single person alone before Christ.

Now you know as well as I that God can do fairly well what he pleases and there are many of us in a crowd this large that have had remarkable experiences of the grace of God in solitude. But I suspect if we could poll this whole crowd we will find that for many of us the most definitive experiences of our lives came when we were together in a group of worshiping believers. I remember I was in the undertaker's automobile riding from the funeral parlor to the cemetery one day and in the car with me was the couple that was the central family members for that funeral.

It was a funeral for an elderly man, his wife had died before him, and this was a nephew of the man who had died whom we were burying and the nephew's wife. There was not another member of the family there. Now I had known the old man that we were burying quite well because he was a remarkable man.

He had been on the coffee exchange in New York at a particularly favorable time and had made a significant amount of money, was quite wealthy. At one time he supported personally over 100

missionaries around the world. So that lets you know something of what his resources were.

And as we were riding from the funeral parlor to the cemetery I was interested in getting acquainted with the nephew who was the single heir to that wealthy man. And the nephew said, you know, this is a very significant moment for me because you see I'm aware that I'm the heir to Mr. Irwin's wealth. But what he has given to me already is of infinitely greater value than anything that will come with the resolution of his estate.

And I looked at him and said, would you explain that to me? Well, he said, you know, my wife and I were Episcopalians and we were like a lot of other members of Protestant churches. We went when it was convenient, when we needed to go. But Christianity meant absolutely nothing to us.

The only thing that ever bothered us was our uncle, who periodically would come to see us and when he came he always wanted to go to church, whether we wanted to go or not. But worse than that, he had a particular interest in these evangelists that came along and appeared occasionally. And when there was an evangelist in our area, he would always say that he wanted to go.

And after all, if you're the single heir to a wealthy man, you find yourself remarkably compatible to his desires, whether they're your desires or not. So he said, I found out that Billy Graham was coming to Syracuse, New York, where I live. And he said, I anticipated it.

I got a call from my uncle, Frank. And he said, now my wife and I would like to come up and visit you. I knew what the date would be.

It would be during that evangelistic crusade. So he said, sure enough, they came. And I found myself trapped into going.

Now he said, I had a little control over what took place. So the four of us found ourselves sitting on the back row in the top seat as high up in the stadium as you could get and as far away from the pulpit as you could get. He said, and I sat through that service.

Now he said, I count myself a fairly rational person. And don't ask me to explain what happened. But he said, you know, when they got down to the close of that service and they started singing that song, just as I am without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me and that thou bidst me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come.

He said, do you know what I found before I knew what I was doing? I had stumbled down those steps. And he said, I found myself in the street because I didn't even know how to get to the infield of the ball of the stadium. He said, I had to get a policeman to tell me how to get into the infield.

And he said, I got in and I went forward and I was listening to what they had to say. And as I listened, somebody nudged me and I looked and it was my wife. And that night in that stadium, the two of us came to know the living Christ.

Now, Billy Graham knows that. And that's why he puts those Crusades together the way he does. Because there is something that takes place when a body of believers come together to seek God that brings a presence and a possibility that is not always there when we are alone in our singleness.

Now, I think there's another angle why God had them meet together three times a year, all of Israel. Now stick with me for a moment. I won't spend long on this.

If we were in a class, I'd spend longer on it. But it's because I'm convinced that God believes that time is very important. Now, you know, I think that we tend to think that eternity is the important thing from the Christian perspective.

But if you go through the scripture, you will find there is an amazing amount of interest in history. You just think about the books of the Bible and how many of them are history. Now, the Christian church has an interest in theology.

The Christian church has an interest in philosophy. The Christian church has an interest in morality and ethics. But you will find that a significant chunk of the Bible is nothing but plain religious history.

One of the fascinating things is that the foundational book for all of scripture is not a theology book or a book on ethics or a book on the things we normally think about as religion. It's the story of a man whose name we know, who lived in a city whose name we know, who had a call from God. And he responded to that call and went on a long journey.

And we know the country he went to. And out of that, a family was produced. And out of that family came a nation.

And so tonight we've sung about Israel. And there is a sense in which the body of Christ is the Israel of God. And the first book in the Bible is simply that story.

Now, God is interested in time. And so he said, I don't want you to let a year pass without it being marked by three appearances in my presence. Because he said, you need to know that the time that you have, I've given to you and I've given it to you for very sacred purposes.

Now, why does he give us the time that he does? I think, let me make a comment there that maybe needs to be made. Now, all time is important with God because he gives it all to us. But it's very evident that some time is more important than other time.

Have you ever noticed that? There are some moments that have potential in them that other moments don't have. I was interested in Lyle's comment to me privately. He said, you know, alcohol got me.

He said, I was so sorry that I had that weakness. And he said, I would get so full of remorse. And he said, I would repent and determine and vow over and over again.

And he said, but I never could master it. And then one day there came a moment when Christ came. And in a moment, something happened that other time could not produce for him.

God is interested in our time, but he is the one who can take some times and make them infinitely richer than other times. Now, I don't need to tantalize you with that because your own mind goes to work on that. You think of the scripture, there were 80 years in the life of Moses before that burning bush.

But it was those few moments when that bush burned that made the difference in universal history. You will remember that there were many other days in his life, but there was one day when God took him up on a mountain. And the course of moral history has never been the same since in that one day when God, those 40 days when God gave to him the law and he brought it down.

And it's been the foundation for all of our moral thinking ever since. And you are aware that there was one night, they called it the Passover night, when God acted in such a way that his people were delivered and God acted in such a way that he said to his people, you mark all of your time from this moment, let this be the beginning of every year for you. It's a little bit like the way we date time, B.C. and A.D. I had a lady who found Christ in one of my churches and I called her one day and we were talking and she was telling about something in her life and so she said, Dennis, that was B.C. And I said, what do you mean, Betty? Oh, she said, you don't understand your own terminology? That was before Christ came into my heart.

But there are those moments when he comes and life can never be the same again. Now you know, that's the reason I think he gives us a time like this. And that was the power of the old-fashioned revival meeting in America, when a church in a community would set apart two weeks and the first priority would be to worship God and to meet him.

An evangelist would come in and the people night after night and maybe morning after morning would gather. And as the days passed, the impact of the word of God got greater and the potential for transformation became greater. And out of those sometimes two weeks, sometimes ten days, sometimes a shorter period of time, there are many of us in this crowd tonight that it was time like that that made the difference and that's the reason that we're here.

I remember my own family. We grew up in a community that was a typical southern community. We had five social classes in our town.

Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and the rest. And that's what they were. They were social classes.

And we all were involved in one of those levels and we knew our place. And so I went to church four times a Sunday. Sunday school and church and Epworth League and church.

And occasionally my father just put me in my place and make me go to Wednesday night prayer meetings. It was the rule of our life. But you know, there was never any transformation in it.

And then my father, against his will, found himself sitting in a camp meeting at Indian Springs, a holiness camp meeting. And he came home and said, this is what my family needs. And he took us, almost all of our family, the next year.

And it was interesting. Everything that I had learned in all those years in church that had never come alive to me, came alive within 15 minutes at the end of a Bible study. When the lady who taught it looked at me and said, Dennis, are you a Christian? And she had very carefully gotten rid of everybody else.

So all of my peers were gone and I didn't have to put on a front and I didn't have to act. I could be honest. And she looked at me and said, Dennis, are you a Christian? And I said, heavens no.

And she said, and if my mother had asked me, I would have lied straight through my teeth. If my pastor had asked me, I would have. If anybody else had asked me, I would have.

But when she said it, the context was such that I could say, I could be honest. And I said, oh no. And she said, wouldn't you like to be? I don't understand the mystery of the miracle of the new birth.

I know when I was baptized, I responded once in an evangelistic crusade before that. Nothing ever happened. But that morning in the quietness of that little Sunday school room, as it were, with that little lady praying for me, and I don't have the vaguest notion what she prayed, when I arose, I knew the living Christ and my own heart had been transformed.

There is an incredible, eternal potential that comes into some moments, and God wants to give those kind of moments to us. And that's the reason we have a conference like this. And it's interesting that people that the world would think needed the most would find the least interest.

And the people that the world would think needed the least are the ones that want the worst to get here. And do you know why that is? Because they've tasted of the presence and the glory of God, and once you've ever tasted, you want all that you can get. I had the privilege of talking with a man, he's a man who has had a very significant influence in this century in the Christian church.

We were standing in an airport and sharing together, and he told me about how when he was 12, he found Christ. When he was 17, God called him into the ministry. He said, I went away to seminary, and he said, I got some intellectual sophistication that began to pollute my soul.

He said, I found myself in the ministry. But he said, do you know there was a memory? There was a memory of a moment when I had met God, and that memory of that moment held me steady through my wanderings. The memory was there, and I could not deny, I could not repudiate it.

And when the right day came, that memory was what brought me back to Christ. Now that's the reason, the value of times like this. What does he want to do? I think he wants to do things like he did for Israel on that night of the Passover when he delivered them from bondage and set them free.

And I would be very surprised, knowing myself, if there isn't sitting in this audience tonight somebody who's got some bondage, enslavement in his own spirit, somebody who is bound, and deep in your spirit there's an urgent yearning, longing for freedom. And God has the power to set you free from the very thing that binds you. It may be what we commonly speak of as some kind of fleshly sin.

It may simply be your own self-interest and your own ego that binds you, and you've longed to break free to where Christ controls your life, and He's Lord and first in your life. In a place like this, it can happen. It's happened before.

It's happened to hundreds of people in this very chapel right here. And if there's that kind of bondage in you tonight, it's possible for you before you leave this campus and before you leave this conference for your spirit to be free. It may be there's somebody in here who never really has known the power of new life within, where God's life surges in and makes you a new creature, and that miracle, the greatest of all miracles that can occur in the human spirit, occurs.

Let me say, it can happen. It can happen. You don't have to be on the outside looking at other people saying, I wish I knew that life, and I wish I knew that joy, and I wish I knew that freedom.

Because you see, that's the way it comes so oftentimes. One of the things that comes in a time like this is a deeper understanding of God and of His ways and of His truth. I don't know about you, but I find myself interested in reading the Book of Acts, the rest of the chapter that we started with a few moments ago, that second chapter.

I don't know whether you've ever lived carefully through it, but sometime you ought to take one of the Gospels and follow it through and see the blindness of the disciple. You take the Gospel of Mark and follow it through, and you will find that Jesus again and again and again and again sat down with Peter and James and John and said, I'm going to a cross. It's necessary for the salvation of the world, and I need to let you know before it takes place.

And never once did the light break across their minds of what He was talking about. And then the Spirit came in that passage we read from. And when the Spirit came, they came flooding down out of that upper room into the streets.

And the people from the temple, the priests, the Levites, they began saying, what's going on here? And Peter stood up and said, you mean you don't understand? Now, the day before, he didn't. And if you had asked him the day before, it would have been inexplicable to him. But when that Spirit came, he understood.

You know, sometimes we think that true evangelism or this kind of thing is counter to true intellectuality. Let me tell you, no man will ever think as straight or no woman will ever think as straight as she or he does when the Spirit of God has touched that person's mind. Then is when truth will begin to fall into place, and we'll see the full picture.

It may be that there is a new level of obedience that God has for somebody in our midst, because we are supposed to grow in grace. And as we walk with Him, He wants to lead us into deeper levels of obedience to Him. And oftentimes it's in a group like this when you're with other Christians.

I'll never forget the first time I ever heard anybody in a group like this talk about tithing. Tithing? Give a tenth of what you own? That was beyond my comprehension, you see. But then you listen to someone tell about the blessing and benefit that comes from that.

When I was growing up, I doubted there was ever a young person less disciplined in human history than I was. And I found myself in a group, and I had a friend across the street who looked at me, and I said, I need to talk. And we went for a walk, and I said, my spiritual life isn't what it ought to be.

And he looked at me and said, Ken Law, how much do you pray? And I lied through my teeth, and he looked back at me and said, just double it. And then I was trapped. But you know, it was in the fellowship of believers that a pattern began to be set for me as to what it meant to be a disciplined follower of Jesus Christ.

There may be levels of obedience for you that you've never reached that tonight God wants to lead you, or in these days God wants to lead you into. It may be that you've strayed and you've let the fires go out in your soul, and a coldness has come in that's begun to grip your spirit. You need to get back as close to the fire as you could get and let your heart be stirred again, so that when you go back to wherever you are, there is something within you that can maintain you there.

I remember when I was in younger years and a pastor at North Carolina, the only people I could find who knew anything about the new birth were a few Baptists and some Pentecostals and some Methodists past 60. If it hadn't been for a Youth for Christ convention in Winona Lake, Indiana that I went to every year, I don't think I would have survived. But it was getting there in that fellowship and letting God restore me again to where I had been and put some fresh stuff in me, that's what kept me going.

And I wouldn't be surprised if there are some of you that in your journey need fresh anointing and a fresh touch within your soul. And it's in times like this that we get vocational clarification. You know, one of the astounding things across the years has been the number of people that Asbury College has sent into the Christian ministry.

It's no accident that it is in a Christian fellowship that that occurs. In 1970, I remember checking, 25% of our students said they were planning on some kind of Christian vocation. And in 1970, there came an outpouring of the Spirit.

And you will remember for eight days, we stayed in Hughes Auditorium and we worshipped. A newspaper journalist asked me how to explain what had happened. And I said, well, sir, you may not understand this, but last Tuesday morning about a quarter of 11, Jesus Christ walked into Hughes Auditorium and we've been paying tribute to his presence ever since.

And that's what happened. Do you know that by 1973, that was 1970, by 1973, 41% of the students across the street were talking about some kind of full-time Christian ministry. You see, when you live for the world, you can live with the world in the midst of the world without anything to challenge that.

You can be comfortable living your life for something other than God's kingdom. But when you get in a place where the presence of God comes and other people are obeying him, then there's an inner voice that says, what about me? And what should I be doing in obedience to Christ? It was in a context like this that God laid his hand on me. And I suspect if we were to take the Christian workers tonight here, the most of us here would say somewhere in a group like this, God began to speak to me and so my life has been in his service.

That's the reason we're finding today many people in seminary with second vocations because they found themselves exposed to the spirit of Christ somewhere and he said, I've got something better for you than medicine or law or education or insurance or whatever it is. And so we have them now as students here. So we have these days, these hours together.

May God help us to use them well. May God help us to open our spirits to his spirit and open our spirits to each other. I'm convinced that it's when we build our walls between us that we find also that we've built our walls between us and him.

But when we let our walls down between ourselves, there's a chance we can get them down between us and him and then he can speak to us and then he can begin to do within our hearts what he wants to do. Now, I don't know why God brought you here, but I'll tell you, I don't think you're here by accident. If you're here, I think it was a sovereign hand of God that brought you on your way and that has you here.

And what a pity it would be if in these hours, days that we have together, what he wants to do for you should be missed. What a wonderful thing if one day when we get around the throne of God and have a chance to look back across the years and share, we could say, you know, it was in that summer assembly in 1992 that I got a clearer focus on what the perfect will of God for me was. And I got a clearer openness to the fullness of his grace.

All times not the same. There's potential now in these hours that we ought to see should we bow our heads together. Lord, we really don't believe you brought any of us here by accident.

You're not that kind of God. You have your purposes, and those purposes are good. And Father, we don't want to miss your best.

We want to be sure that we've found your best. We won't live but once. And we don't want to lose time.

We don't want to lose a day. We don't want to lose a month. We don't want to lose a year.

We don't want to lose the time you give us because you want it to count and use it for eternal purposes. And so, Father, open our hearts, make us sensitive, quicken our faith, and let us put our arms around your perfect will for every one of us. And we will give you praise in Christ's name.

Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/20/SID20951.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/dennis-kinlaw/god-come-to-his-gathering/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net