Two Gather - Part Three

The Right People and The Right Voice

(Matthew 18:20)

Today, we are wrapping up this series entitled “Two Gather” and last week we talked about having the faith to forgive, being able to break free from the roots of bitterness and unforgiveness. In week number one, we talked about seeking to restore a believer who has gone off on a detour, refusing to let them go, and coming after them again and again and again with relentless grace. And today, we’re going to talk about having “The Right people and The Right Voice” in our lives, because some of you are in trouble right now. You’ve been struggling through life on your own, or you’ve been hanging with the wrong people, and you’ve been listening to the wrong voices.

If you remember, when we begin this series, in part one we read the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew chapter 18, verse 20, where he said,

“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20).

And we discovered how this verse is often taken out of context, because Jesus was talking about the correction of a wayward believer that has wandered away. In other words, he was talking about one or two others seeking the restoration of the lost, not gathering together for a prayer meeting.

The good news is that the principle remains the same because the Bible does describe over and over and over again the very special presence of God that is with us as we gather together in community with other believers. In fact, shortly after Jesus resurrection we find the believers empowered by the Holy Spirit within that context. In Acts chapter 2, Luke tells us,

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place” (Acts 2:1).

And so, all the believers were together, and someone might ask, “Well, does that mean that Jesus is not with me if I’m by myself?” And the answer is, of course not, because Jesus will never leave you nor forsake you. In fact, over and over and over again the Scripture talks about the eyes of the Lord being everywhere, how he sees us in the secret place, and David said it this way,

“Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast” (Psalms 139:7-10).

And so, God is there, he’s always present, but the problem for so many people is that they are missing one thing, they’re missing the right people in their lives.

Many people today are trying to do life on their own, without a close friend in their life, but you will never accomplish all that God wants you to accomplish without having the right voice in your life. This is a consistent theme you can see all through the Bible because God intended for us to support one another, helping one another, praying for one another, and doing life together, centered around our relationship with him. In fact, the Bible says,

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10).

And so, one may be overpowered, but two can defend themselves; and just as the right people can help you move in the right direction; the truth is that the wrong people will take you in the wrong direction. That’s why the Bible warns,

“Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

And so, it’s important that we recognize the wrong people in our lives, because very quickly we may find ourselves backed into a corner, doing something that we don’t want to do.

For example, we find the story of Samson and Delilah in the book of Judges. Samson was a man who had been set apart for God’s purposes and he had this amazing supernatural strength, but he also had a weakness for pretty ladies. And so, Samson had fallen in love with this young lady named Delilah, but she was a Philistine, these were the enemies of Israel, and the Bible says,

“The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, "See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him” (Judges 16:5).

And so, Delilah went undercover to try to get the secret of his strength. Over and over and over again she asked him,

"Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued” (Judges 16:6).

But time and time again, Samson did not tell her the truth about the secret to his strength, and so she kept nagging him. She didn’t give up, and the Bible says, “She said to him,

"How can you say, 'I love you,' when you won't confide in me?” …you have made a fool of me because you haven't told me the secret of your great strength. And “with such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death” (Judges 16:15-16).

She went on and on and on until finally he couldn’t take anymore, and the Bible says he told her everything,

“No razor has ever been used on my head," he said, "because I have been a Nazirite set apart to God since birth. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man” (Judges 16:17).

Unfortunately, this led to Samson’s demise, but it’s a very common problem in our lives as well, because we allow the wrong people to be the dominant voices speaking into our lives. And so, in one way or another, they corner us, they start to pull our strings, until we end up tired and weakened, surrendering the direction of our lives to someone besides God.

I want to pause for a moment and ask you to think of those people you spend the most time with, those dominant voices in your life, because I believe as you consider those relationships, you’ll be able to see the trajectory of your life. For example, if you spend most of your time with your neighbors, or the people you work with, or maybe the friends who call themselves Christians but don’t live like it. If you keep company with people like that, allowing them to speak into your life, becoming the dominant voice in your life, they will pull you down to their level.

That’s why the Bible warns us to be careful, because…

“The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Proverbs 18:21).

And so, you’ll want to listen to the right voice and not the wrong voices, because they will either be life-giving or life taking. Those voices can create, or they can destroy, they can heal, or they can hurt, they can tear down or they can build up. And that’s why it’s so important to consider carefully the people, the relationships, and the voice you listen to, because they will set the trajectory of your life.

You see, with their words, maybe with flattery, threats, or guilt, they will grab the strings of your life and start leading you like a puppet to do things you know you should not do. And I’m reminded of Elijah after he called down fire from heaven, destroying the prophets of Baal in first Kings chapter 18. He had won a great victory for God in Israel, but as soon as he comes down off the mountain, he discovers that King Ahab had rushed home to his wife Jezebel to tell her what Elijah had done.

Now, if you don’t know Jezebel, she was a tool of the enemy to infiltrate the Israelites, and Satan used her to creep into the ranks of the righteous and plant a seed of idolatry in Israel. The spirit behind her was so vicious, so venomous, that you couldn’t stop her, you just can’t destroy the spirit of Jezebel, and she is just as treacherous as she is cunning. Which is why you find Jesus warning the church in the New Testament about this spirit. In Revelation chapter 2, he said,

“I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality” (Revelation 2:20).

In other words, Jesus says, you can’t tolerate it, you’ve got to cut off that relationship, that influence, and you’ve got to set up boundaries, because you can’t allow it to continue infiltrating the church.

You see, Jezebel was more than just a pretty face, she was lewd and promiscuous, she had no morality or standards, and in first Kings, she had attached herself to King Ahab like a bloodsucker on the ankle of Israel. She was sucking the life out of Israel’s praise, out of their worship, and out of their consecration to God. Jezebel was far worse than Delilah, and Ahab had entered into a covenant with her, he married that undercover agent of Satan, and he brought disgrace to the throne of Israel. And so, like a snake she had slithered into the camp of Israel, and she will do the same thing in the church today, because whenever Satan attempts to destroy the righteous, destroying the integrity of the church, he will do that by getting you to enter into a relationship with this demonic spirit of Jezebel.

And so, you can’t just be friends with anybody, you’ve got to watch out for the spirit of Jezebel, because not only is she sneaky, but she will intimidate you. When Ahab told Jezebel that Elijah had withstood 450 of her prophets and they were all dead, she was infuriated. She could have sent chariots and soldiers after Elijah, but she didn’t have to because she knew the power of her voice. She simply opened her mouth and roared, she said,

"May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them” (1 Kings 19:2).

Suddenly, the same man who had called fire down on Mount Carmel, the same man who had confronted 450 prophets of Baal, the same man who had the courage to face death for his belief in the God of Israel was terrified, not over the woman, but because of her voice.

You see, whenever you are doing great things for God, the enemy will send a voice to terrorize you, and so Jezebel just opened her mouth and roared. That’s why the Bible warns us,

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

You see, if the enemy can paralyze you in fear, if he can terrorize you with his roar, he will devour you. And so, he will roar so that you forget to pray, forget to worship, and forget what God told you he was going to do in your life.

In fact, I’m afraid that some of you are paralyzed, your frozen in that spot, because you’ve been listening to the wrong voice. You’re scared to death of the roar, terrified and living in fear of Jezebel’s voice, because just like she threatened Elijah, she is threatening you. She is whispering in your ear, “You know how your grandmother died of cancer, your father was unfaithful, or your uncle was an alcoholic, and it’s going to happen to you too.”

That’s what this spirit does, it says, “You’re going to get it too, you’re not going to be able to stay either.” It doesn’t even have to touch you, it just threatens you, stealing your joy, confusing you and robbing you of that victory that God gave you; because somewhere in the back of your mind there is a voice telling you, “It’s not going to last, you’re not going to make it, nobody loves you, and nobody appreciates you.” And so, even though you are blessed, you don’t feel blessed.

The voice of Jezebel made Elijah tremble with fear, the mighty man of God panicked, he thought this was it, and the Bible says,

“Elijah was afraid and ran for his life…” (1 Kings 19:3).

I wonder how many of you today are recognizing that you have heard Jezebel’s voice? Elijah heard her voice, he heard her threat, and ran for his life. He went into the desert where…

“He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said” (1 Kings 19:4).

And so, after having had the greatest victory in his ministry, the mighty man of God sank into such depression, such despair, that he gave up hope and wanted to die.

That’s what Jezebel’s voice will do, it will cause you to get indigestion, it will keep you up at night, it will taunt you and haunt you. Jezebel’s voice will cause you to panic when the phone rings, cause you to live in fear of coming home to an empty house, wondering what to do if they leave you. Jezebel’s voice will cause you to search his pockets when you’re doing laundry, not because you’re hoping to find money, but because you’ve been hurt before. Jezebel’s voice will tell you, “Its going to happen again, it will fall apart just like the last time,” but the devil is a liar.

And so, in order to break free from that negative influence, you can’t tolerate it, you’ve got to stop listening to the wrong voices, and start listening to the right voice. You will want to hang around with the right people, people that are led by the Spirit of God, because when the right people gather together for the right reasons, God is there among us, and the right things happen. That’s why the Bible says,

“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together…but let us encourage one another all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

And so, when you hang around with the right people, people who are seeking God, who are involved in church, people who make God’s word a priority, people who pray and use their gifts to make a difference in the community, you can know your life will be heading in the right direction.

Some of you may decide today to begin weeding out your relationships because you want to have kingdom focus. And that is important because the right relationships rarely happen by accident; those relationships that take us deeper in our walk with God will take time and commitment. But it will all be worthwhile, as the Bible says,

“Understanding the present time. The hour has come…” (Romans 13:11).

And so, this is the hour, this is the time, we don’t have time for mindless chatter, we’ve got to start using every opportunity to strengthen one another, building the right relationships with each other, because when you understand the present time, an urgency rises up and you don’t have time to hear a lot of foolishness.

I can’t help but think what it must have been like to be with Jesus, sitting under his teaching day by day, because every moment with him was an opportunity to glean what the Spirit was saying to the church. And Jesus taught the disciples everywhere he went, he was always teaching the disciples, because he knew that he only had a certain amount of time to get through to them. In John chapter 10, Jesus taught the disciples an important lesson, he taught them about listening to the right voice. And this is so important for us to understand today, because he says in verse one,

“I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber” (John 10:1).

But then he says, “The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out” (John 10:2-3).

“When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice” (John 10:4-5).

And so, Jesus said, my sheep know my voice, not that they are praying about it, fasting about it, or trying to figure it out, but he says they know my voice.

Today we are living in a generation that is all about knowing God’s Word, and we need to know his word, but the devil knows his word too. And so, it’s not enough just to know his Word when you’re going through the fire, when life is falling apart around you, you’ve got to know his voice. When you’ve got big decisions to make, different options and choices, you’ve got to know his voice. In verse 27, Jesus said,

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).

And so, Jesus expects his sheep to listen to his voice. He said, “They know my voice.” And so, he’s talking about hearing from God, he’s talking about a committed relationship, not being unstable, jumping from church to church, place to place, or ministry to ministry, because it is expected that you as his sheep would know that you’ve heard from him.

In Revelation chapter 3, Jesus said, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20).

He said, “If anyone hears my voice,” not just those in ministry, but anyone, and so you’ve got to know his voice. And it doesn’t matter how you get it, it may be an audible voice, it may come through a man or a woman, but it doesn’t matter what kind of package it is in, because God can use anything to speak to your heart when you really know his voice. He can speak to you through a commercial on TV, a song on the radio, a sign as your driving down the road, or through your children as they are playing; but you’ve got to know that you heard his voice. That’s why he said,

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 2:7).

And so, the real challenge for us today is to grow, to move into deeper levels of spirituality, not just speaking but hearing the deep things of God. This is so important because if you can hear what the Holy Spirit is saying, you will make decisions that will bless you and your children. Not because you’re so smart, not because you know what’s going on, but because you’ve heard from God. That’s how you get the victory, that’s how you win the fight, you’ve got to hear the right voice.

I don’t know who this message is for today, but I know this message is for somebody, because you have been in a fight with the enemy and he is trying to make you think that God doesn’t love you, but the devil is a liar. In fact, you need to know that God heard you and help is on the way, just like the angel Gabriel told Daniel,

“Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard…” (Daniel 10:12).

I am so thankful that we serve a God that hears, but not only that, we serve a God who answers. Even though he sits enthroned in majesty above the circle of the earth, he is a prayer answering God who has all the power in his hand.

“Surely, the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear” (Isaiah 59:1).

In fact, he told Jeremiah, “Call upon me and see if I will not answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know” (Jeremiah 33:3).

If you call on Jesus today, he will answer, because he hears and he is the God who answers.

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