

What are 'assembly meetings'?

Part 1

Speaker	Gavin Hughes
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[00:00:01] Acts 2.42 Acts 2.42 They continue steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine, teaching and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Just got a little calendar to read to you.

It says, Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound. They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of your countenance. Psalm 89 The gate of the court shall be a hanging of twenty cubits of blue, purple, scarlet and fine twine linen. Exodus 27 According to Numbers 10, the silver trumpets were used to call and assembly on special occasions. The joyful sound brought the people to the gate of the court surrounding the tabernacle. That's God's dwelling place.

They would see the heavenly blue, the sacrificial scarlet, the royal purple, all wonderfully blended together in the purity of white linen. May we see him in his fullness today.

Happy indeed are the people who heed the call to remember me.

[00:01:03] And the poem says, Assembled, Lord, at thy request, we wait thy voice to hear.

O come and bless this hallowed feast in spirit now drawn near.

Lovely little thought there.

We know that the assembly is New Testament ground formed, as we've heard, on the day of Pentecost.

But still in the Old Testament, those that trusted in God were called and these trumpets were blown. And it's a happy thought. They were called and they responded. And there's something there for us now, today, to respond to the call.

You might be a believer. You might have been saved for many years and been to many meetings. But if you're like any other person, your heart will sometimes wane and grow cold. And even if in my

few words this morning, it's an encouragement to us to keep getting to the meetings where the Lord is with his people. That would be a grand thing.

And I speak to myself first before anybody else, but especially to younger ones. [00:02:01] He assembles us together and we come together with Christ as the center.

You don't come to the meeting to see somebody else. That would be a disappointment. Christ is the center. And that's why the simplicity of the way we seek to meet is so profound and so wonderful. We're nothing.

Christ is everything.

We're not left as to the method or the mode or the format as to how we meet. We don't have to worry about that. We have it in the scripture. We've got it here in Acts 2, 42. The big three, we might say.

A soldier knows the big three, name, rank, and number. For us, the big three, you might say, is the reasons for coming together in Acts 2, verse 42.

The apostles, doctrine, and teaching, and fellowship.

Here we go.

This is the sheet.

The apostles are gone now. They've died.

We don't have apostles, but we have the word of God. We have ministry, teaching meetings, breaking of bread, and prayer.

[00:03:05] All these bits of paper in front of me. Let's just talk.

What is the most important?

I think all three. I don't think one of them is the most important. I think all three are equally important. Teaching, the ministry of the word, the breaking of bread, and prayer.

Have I gone through that already?

I just wanted to get that point out.

Not one of them is more important than the other. But I would suggest to you the breaking of bread, the Lord's Supper, is the most intimate. It should really touch and even wrench our hearts. Often we feel it doesn't, but it ought to. The sufferings of Christ.

But what I wanted to just say, here we are. It's formed straight after Pentecost. So we're not left. They weren't left as to how they should meet. The instruction came very quickly in Acts 2, verse 42. And I just want to emphasize this fact. We're called out. Ecclesia, church, the assembly, we're called out. It should mark us out. We should be different. [00:04:01] We ought to walk even as he walked.

The Lord said, they are not of the world even as I am not of the world. And there's a similar Greek word in Matthew 2 and John 1. Out of and of God.

And Mark 1, 20.

He called them. So that emphasizes the character of these meetings. They're spiritual.

They're holy.

They're heavenly. We come together. Christ is the center. We're called out. We should be different. We should be marked out as being different. Easy to fail and perform.

Only one assembly but expressed locally in many places.

Matthew 18, 20.

And it's for believers on the Lord Jesus Christ. You may come to a meeting, but do you belong to it? You need to be purchased by the blood of Christ to belong to the assembly. You belong to the Lord Jesus washed in his precious blood.

And that's very important. We want to make sure every person here, even a young one, is washed in the blood of Christ. [00:05:02] They know him.

And the expression that we want to also emphasize is when you come together. That's the key. We find that in 1 Corinthians 10 and 14.

As Paul was speaking to the saints there, they had many problems. Be encouraged by the Corinthians. They had heaps of problems.

You say, I've got heaps of problems. They did in Corinth. And there's an answer. There's a solution to these problems. When you come together, we meet in the way that he prescribes.

Not in the way we think will feel good or be more convenient. There's lots of things that we get tempted to do in the meeting that would be very convenient and organized. But it's great to have the Holy Spirit to realize that he is in the center and he is leading. When you come together is the key phrase to pick out in Corinthians. And if unbelievers come in, it says, they will be impressed. If there's a talking in a foreign tongue or in an irrational fashion, they'll say you're mad.

[00:06:06] This gives us good teaching for some of the strange things we hear today, sadly, in places where believers come together. There shouldn't be confusion. There should be clarity, simplicity, and openness.

And if people come in who are not believers in Christ, they will be impressed if they hear the word of God taught and explained. And they will be affected. The spirit of God will affect them.

A very important verse in the Bible, let everything be done decently and in order. 1 Corinthians 14, 26.

And that's a grand verse for us at all times. We can stray.

We can go off at a tangent.

Let everything be done decently and in order. I think that includes even every aspect of our lives, not just when we come together. But there must be a decency and an order in the way we come together. We know there are meetings for these things, young people, mothers and toddlers, senior citizens, and so on. [00:07:04] And they're very good. We don't see them highlighted in the New Testament as specific assembly meetings when we're called together. Acts 2.42 doesn't mention them. But it mentions these three.

The apostles, doctrine and fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. But they're all very good.

And I've said they're good and most needful. But not assembly meetings.

But assembly order would be quite in order where appropriate. Ladies to wear hats and all the rest of it.

And that decency and order.

It can't be enforced, of course, if we have mothers and toddlers in who know nothing of Christ. We want to appeal to them.

It's an evangelistic meeting. We want to appeal to them.

And we're told in the Scriptures, aren't we, to go out and preach the gospel. Many would prefer to go out of the walls of the place of meeting. To the fields and the highways and the byways. But where opportunity arises, true assembly worship will result in some of these. [00:08:04] And I found that provoking to my own conscience, really.

Are these things taking place that others may trust in the Lord and want to come to the meeting, to the assembly. To the locality where believers meet in simplicity with Christ as the center. Are meetings growing or are they diminishing? It's very challenging for us. We're on our knees about it.

And here we have guidance as to teaching. 1 Corinthians 14 is the big chapter. You hear a lot about so-called tongues today. Get into 1 Corinthians 14.

You'll get lots of answers and help there.

But don't spend ages and ages debating it or contesting it.

If a believer you know is serious about it, pray about it. Read through this chapter with them. Be sober.

Be calm.

Be confident in the Word of God in 1 Corinthians 14. But don't enter into debate. There is no debate with the Word of God. We can't go in and say it.

[00:09:02] We can't have the last word. It is His Word. 1 Corinthians 14 gives us good guidance.

There's the negative side of the tongues. But then there's the teaching for edification. Improvement of the mind.

That we might grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why we come together. One of the reasons. To grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. And we have the example in that same chapter. The breaking of bread in 1 Corinthians 11.

The Lord said.

Paul said about how the Lord in the same night in which he was betrayed. Took bread.

The intimacy of the Lord's Supper.

The very night in which he was betrayed. Just before his sufferings.

Such was the intent and desire and passion of Christ.

To have his own with him.

With the emblems. With desire.

I have desire to eat this Passover with you. I wanted to emphasize that. The passion and desire of the Lord Jesus Christ. To have his people around him. To break the bread. And if you're a young person. [00:10:02] And you're not breaking a bread. And you ought to be.

Don't hang about.

If your life is right. With the Lord.

Put it right.

Put it right.

Time's running out. The Lord might come this afternoon. In which case you'll have missed it. We'll be with him. But don't delay. Don't tarry.

In terms of breaking bread.

It's so intimate to Christ. Far more intimate to Christ than it is to us. With desire.

With desire.

I have desired. To eat this Passover with you. Psalm 50, 15 I think.

Or verse 5.

Gather my saints together unto me. The Lord said.

The interest from his side.

The desire.

The intent.

Gather my saints together unto me. And Genesis 48 or 49. 49. Come near to me my brethren.

I pray you.

Joseph said.

Come near my brethren.

I pray you.

And that's where we are. That is from God's side.

The son of God's side. They want us to be around the Lord Jesus.

[00:11:03] I hope that will provoke us.

Especially if we're younger. Don't.

Don't put it off. Don't wait.

Don't tarry.

If there's no real reason. It's nothing to do with your suitability. Because you're utterly unsuitable. As I am.

It's what you are in Christ.

Prayer.

Many. Many guidance on prayer. Pray without ceasing. We talk about prayer as the powerhouse.

Which it rightly is. We'd probably all put our hands up if we said who feels they don't pray enough. We'd all put our hands up so we won't be a waste of energy. We know it's true. But just from this day forward be encouraged by the Lord to pray more. Pray without ceasing.

And we have examples in the book of Acts. We had them praying before the day of Pentecost of course. They gathered together and prayed. And then of course there was another prayer meeting. And the answer comes with a knock on the door. I say leave us alone. We're praying about something. And the answer is actually knocking on the door. So we pray and then we don't always believe or realize when God has answered. But he can answer prayer in very powerful ways. And we

don't want to forget those wonderful answers to prayer.

[00:12:11] Ministry is for edification.

The improvement of the heart and mind.

Whatsoever things are pure and honest and just and of good report, if there be any praise, think on these things.

That's what God wants for us. He wants us to come together for the improvement of the mind. Everything that's in the world around us is dirty and filthy. It defiles, it stains, it spoils.

Our thought lives can be ruined or even devastated in this world if we think along things and see along things. But God wants us to come together for edification. And we'll only get that if we come together in simplicity with the Word of God to be spoken, open meetings we call them, to let the Spirit lead and be taught from the Scriptures. The Scriptures are key. The Scriptures are foundation. The big giveaway is because the devil will do everything he can [00:13:02] to stop you and me reading our Bibles on a daily basis. The Scriptures are preeminent. He won't let up.

He won't let up.

We need to be praying more and looking to the Lord and opening up the Word of God. And isn't it good when we come together for ministry, for edification?

Can't you think of many meetings when you've had your soul, your heart and mind refreshed and encouraged, your heart lifted, cheered, or you felt corrupted?

I felt really awkward and I felt I've been shifty in the meeting because I know there's things not right and the Word of God has been spoken and it is like an arrow and it hurts.

But that's what God wants. He wants to knock the rough edges off of you and me. He wants to correct us and guide us. And that's what 2 Timothy 3.16 says, that Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction. And we need that Word and it's a grand thing when we get it. But it is painful and it hurts. [00:14:01] I don't say it with any gladness but it hurts. So don't be surprised if you feel you're squirming in your seat sometimes. My brother takes up a message. He doesn't realize you need it but God does and that's why it's good to gather to His name with a Holy Spirit to lead and control because He knows best, God the Holy Spirit. And these meetings for ministry are very important and I'm sure many of us have happy memories of such comings together, improving the mind and heart, growing in grace as we said and in the knowledge of the Lord. The breaking of bread.

I've heard this expression, it's a terrible expression, isn't it? Oh they're bread breakers, they're bread breakers. People just go to the breaking of bread and they don't go to anything else. We can't do that, can we?

The Lord wants us to get together as often as we can. Remembering the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do you do that?

Have you got a good reason if you don't, why you don't? If you haven't, pray about it and speak to somebody.

It is so important. Why?

[00:15:01] For His sake first, not actually yours.

For His, with desire.

I have desired to eat this Passover with you. It magnifies His person.

When we come together, even though the flesh within us might try to bring in thoughts of work or home life or somebody else or criticism, the Holy Spirit will guide us and help us to see the Lord Jesus shine before our hearts and our minds as we gather together in the midst.

There am I in the midst, in the centre.

He is the focal point, the hub of when we come together.

If we keep that, He will bless us and He will be most gracious and lead us on. But it's to magnify His person, for touching our hearts.

How sensitive the Lord Jesus is.

I have desired to eat this Passover with you. It's often been said, there used to be meetings where there was plenty of tears in such a meeting. That can happen again.

[00:16:02] The Lord can do anything with us if we open ourselves up to Him. Expecting His soon return, break this bread until I come. So we look back to the cross and we look forward. The breaking of bread is also a keen reminder, not only of Calvary's cross, but of the Lord's return, which could be very soon.

When we take the bread on a Sunday, we often think, this could be the last time I take this bread. And it would be a shame, it would be a pity, to go to be with the Lord and we didn't do it. You might say, well it won't matter then, but it will be real, we will see His face, we'll hear His voice, we'll see Him, we'll be in front of Him. He might say, that was a pity. It's a shame you didn't do that. It was all on account of what I did for you. It wasn't on account of what you thought of yourself. Think about these things.

It gets your eyes off yourself and on Christ. Expressing the unity of the body of Christ, we being many are one bread.

There is only one body.

[00:17:01] We've had this from Hugh already.

The church, one body.

The building and the bride.

But expressed in many different places, as far as possible with like-minded Christians and other subjects might come out later, it's difficult to do these things with people who have completely different views.

But I hope these aren't our views. We're not here to say this is the way so-called brethren meet. Not at all.

We're here to say, this is what the scriptures say, this is what we should be doing. It's not a question of, well this is the brethren's format of meeting. Not so. This is the scripture way of meeting. And we mustn't think, well I do this, no problem, I'll just carry on. We need to be constantly searching our hearts that we're going on in His will.

It's a scriptural way. And we believe this is the way, Acts 2.42, and we've seen it in all these scriptures. Wouldn't it be a pickle if we were left to decide how to meet ourselves? We hear of various things that people do when they come together. [00:18:01] But if they're not in here, I daren't do them. It's not advisable.

The scriptures are our anchor and our guide.

And prayer expresses our dependence.

Haven't you been to some wonderful prayer meetings? There's often tears in prayer meetings, sometimes praying for somebody that's maybe about to be taken. And we can all remember those prayer meetings. There's a few folk here that were the theme of those prayer meetings.

And we've seen the Lord work. We can look back many years.

Special prayer meetings often seem to be the best ones, don't they? But that's our human nature.

When the going gets really tough, we have a special prayer meeting. But, you know, it'd be good to have more one-off prayer meetings, wouldn't it? I know it's a busy world. But let's never close our minds to that. Or just darting around a brother or sister's house. We should have five minutes of prayer. Can we just go up in your bedroom and have ten minutes of prayer? This is on my heart.

Wouldn't that be good if our lives were marked with a bit more of that? I've said it this time. I must pop around every word of prayer. And then it doesn't happen.

[00:19:02] I should make it happen. We should be more ardent about our prayer life, shouldn't we? Single prayer.

But as we come together in assembly to pray.

And there was great power in the Book of Acts when they came together to pray. Prayer is powerful.

We have seen it. We've seen it in the summer, didn't we?

In Tunbridge, we saw prayer.

We saw the wonderful outcome of many, many saints praying all over the country and abroad and seeing souls converted blatantly before our eyes.

I haven't seen nine people trust the Lord before and then spoke to them and seen it for real. It was a first for me. But the bottom line is that was prayer.

That had not a scrap to do with me or anybody else. That was because of prayer.

And prayer is powerful.

Now, the character of all these meetings should be, as we said earlier, that everything be done decently and in order. I can't say that enough.

And I think about my own life and the way I carry out my life, [00:20:02] the way I go around with my work and in my home. I feel this scripture is very, very powerful. Is there a decency and an order? But as we come together, it should be marked by this decency and order, holiness, where the Lord Jesus wants to be in our midst. That's the whole point, isn't it? He, the Son of God, in our midst.

We see him by faith and we feel his presence amongst us.

How often do we feel his presence? Do you feel some Sunday mornings you feel it's completely bland and dry? And we know straight away it can only be because of us, not because of him. I don't believe he will come amongst us if we were all in a dreadful spiritual state. It's quite challenging, isn't it? Many brethren have told us over the years, what are we doing on a Saturday? What are we doing on a Saturday night before the next day when the Lord's going to be in our midst?

Decently and in order. Which one is the most important? Well, we've talked about it.

I believe all three are just as important. [00:21:02] But I think the breaking of bread is perhaps the most intimate. Well, we've quoted quite a few scriptures. Psalm 50 is a precious one.

And I've just got a couple of points here because I'm just about inside my time as well. Straight after Pentecost, we weren't left to our own devices. The scriptures had given us the method of meeting together.

We called out.

I just want to emphasize that. We had called out.

We had called out. The Lord Jesus said, John 17, verse 16, they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. That's an amazing scripture.

It's stamping upon us what we are in Christ and should affect our habits, our lives.

And if they need correcting, let's make it today. Don't dwell on your past failures. Confess them and then move on. We're not of the world. It's for people that belong to Christ, purchased by his blood.

[00:22:02] It's not right to have people coming in and taking bread and wine who know not Christ.

This happens a lot, but it's not correct. It's not right. It's not orderly, is it? It's not decently in an order. I'm not criticizing. I'm just saying these things need to be set clear in our minds. We want that person with all our heart to trust in the Lord Jesus, but the Lord's Supper was for those who are not of the world. The Lord's Supper was for those that knew him and belonged to him. It's not an exclusivity. I mean, John 3.16 is quite clear.

But the Lord's Table is for the Lord's people. And I hope every young person here can say, I am one of the Lords.

And if you are, what about baptism and what about breaking of bread? Edification, that's why we come together.

One of the reasons for the ministry. Edification, it's a big word. The improvement of the mind and the heart. Pure, precious truths from God.

Heavenly food, the bread of God.

Come together for edification. [00:23:02] And we need it.

And we need it to live in this world.

We come together for blessing and profit.

Benefit growth.

Growing grace in the knowledge of the Lord. Aren't these wonderful, positive things? All the reasons we come together. There's great blessing for us. But the point I have at the end here is for the glory and praise of God the Father and the Son. There am I in the midst.

That's the first reason for coming together. For the glory and praise and pleasure of God who sent his Son into this world. And for the pleasure of the Lord Jesus for him.

Because he says, with desire, I have desired to eat this Passover with you. And so that is most important.

And that really was the point I wanted to finish on.

And to remember that invitation.

Do this in remembrance of me.

[00:24:05] Do this in remembrance of me.

So I hope these thoughts will be of help.

If you hit me with a hard question now.

I'll pass it to Michael or Nicholas here in the front.

So much could be said.

I feel it's been a little bit broken. But they were the main points I really wanted to put over. I did want to make young people here feel a little bit uncomfortable. If they're not breaking bread. And they should be. Because it's for the glory of Christ who hung on the cross for us. It's for the glory of God. It's for the praise of the Father. He wants us to be worshippers. And he wants us to remember him.

Governor, you mentioned at the start the blowing of the silver trumpets, I think, to call the people together.

And one of the things that sometimes had to be sounded was an alarm.

[00:25:03] And I've been wondering if you would allow the meeting in 1 Corinthians 5 as a sort of exceptional gathering together of the assembly for discipline in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ when you're coming together. There was a matter there of discipline and the assembly had to come together to deal with it. Now, that's not normal.

But it's sad to say sometimes it's necessary. Maybe exceptional. But it's the very thing that is missing in current evangelicalism and in many fellowships around. Discipline is pretty well nonexistent.

So would you allow the possibility of an assembly meeting also for discipline if necessary?

Well, I'm a very small person. I don't allow or disallow in these things. But that's a very good point, isn't it, that there should be this sort of coming together to deal with matters. It reminds me of what we call a brother's meeting or a care meeting or an administration meeting. I think of that verse, let everything be done decently and in order, [00:26:03] even the way we're dealing with administration and finances and gifts and all these sort of things. But as you importantly say, that is a very important discipline. And if we can't be open and frank and direct with one another in these things, who can be?

The Lord is able to help us in those things. But they are most needful, yeah.