



GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion
57 – Context, Context and Context

Announcements:

2/7 @6:30 -

Women's
Bible Study

2/8 @7:00 -

Prayer

2/9 @6:30 -

Grace Group

2/12 @8:30 -

Sunday School

2/13 @6:30 -

Men's Discipleship
- Question 7

2/26 @5:30 -

Joint Service With
La Luz Bible
Church

ICE BREAKER: Who is the best teacher you have ever had?

READ: Matthew 18:15-20

When I was in college I had the blessing of going (three times!) to a two week conference on developing a christian worldview. It was here that I was properly introduced to what has now become one of my most favorite words. In one session the subject was “how to properly read the Bible”. The person doing the lesson stood up and said if he could only teach us all three things about how to properly understand God’s word those three things would be (in order of importance) “Context, context and Context.” And To illustrate this he took us to the very passage that we just read. He made the point that these verses are often ripped out of context for innocent or well intentioned reasons, but in taking these out of context we have done two things: we have missed the point that *the author* was trying to make and cheapened the point that *we* are trying to make. Today I would like us all to see this same thing. To do that I would like to focus in particular at the final verse: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them.”

We have all probably heard this verse, though honestly we have really heard it in the proper context. I feel like the most common place that this verse is brought up is at prayer meetings. Because if we are honest, prayer meetings usually have only two or three people. So the thought goes like this: It's ok that there are not too many people in this prayer meeting, because where two or three are gathered Jesus is here with us! Theologically speaking it is true, Jesus is there when two or three people are gathered. But what happens if we push this thought. What if I am the only one who shows up to a prayer meeting, then there is only one person, is Jesus still there? The answer is a resounding yes. For he is with us always, to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). And the promise that we have from God that he will “never leave us nor forsake us” (Hebrews 13:5) is much richer than assuming that we need two or three people to be there to have Jesus with us. In other words, the point that we want to make is that Jesus hears our prayer (true!, in fact he is the one that forever intercedes on our behalf!) but by using this verse we are left with a weaker promise than we could have!

DISCUSS: Can you think of any other times that we take a promise of God and replace it with a weaker version?

The bigger issue that I see, however, is that using this verse out of context misses the beauty of what Jesus is trying to get across. On Sunday we looked at it as the POWER of confrontation. In other words, this gets us to the intent of Matthew when he wrote these words. The point of this passage is not to make you feel better when only two or three people are gathered, but rather to communicate to the church that when they gather, no matter the size of the church, they gather with the power and authority and the presence of their savior. So technically this does apply to prayer meetings where only a few people show up, but it also applies to any sunday school meeting or service or ANYTHING where believers gather to be the church. Jesus is there, he is with us, he is empowering us and he has given us authority. So we should live in that victory!

DISCUSS: Why is a bigger view of this promise better? What does it mean for us that Jesus is “with us”? How can we communicate that to the world around us?