

JESUS PRAYS
JOHN 17:20-26

Few things reveal the nature and condition of our hearts like prayer (when we are genuine and truthful).

That is true as well of the heart of Christ, which makes the Lord's prayer in John 17 a particularly rich and stimulating passage of Scripture. Of this passage, Melancthon wrote, "There is no voice which has ever been heard, either in heaven or in earth, more exalted, more holy, more fruitful, more sublime, than the prayer offered up by the Son of God himself." As another also noted, "We have before us one of the most intimate glimpses anywhere in Scripture of the mind and heart of the Lord..." [Pentecost]

Believers have long been drawn to this passage: John Knox had it read to him every day during his final illness, and it was read to him as he entered glory upon his earthly death. James Montgomery Boice's preached 17 sermons on this passage — a short series compared to Thomas Manton's 45!

We are attracted to it because unlike too many of our prayers, this prayer is no shallow sentiment. It is Christ revealing His eternal desires for His eternal people. And remember this, since Christ has prayed it, by definition it must be fully attainable and He must have made all the resources that are at His disposal available for the believer to realize these truths and "requests." The requests are not mere wishes. They are in a real sense Christ's directives and provisions.

The prayer is divided into 3 primary movements: 1) Christ's prayer for Himself (vv. 1-5); 2) Christ's prayer for the disciples (vv. 6-19); and 3) Christ's prayer for the disciples to come (vv. 20-26). That last portion is what we will examine today, with an emphasis on how to learn to pray from Christ's prayer:

JESUS' PRAYER FOR US IS OUR PATTERN FOR PRAYING — AND LIVING.

Jesus' requests to His Father for us guide how we should pray and live.

1. **Christ Prays for **Us** (v. 20)**
 - ✓ Christ prays for us as He prays for the 12
 - ✓ Because Christ prays for us...
2. **Christ Prays for Our **UNION** with **ONE ANOTHER** (vv. 21-23)**
 - ✓ Christ prays that we would be one (unified)
 - ✓ Christ prays that we would be one as an expression of the Trinity's oneness
 - ✓ Christ prays for our oneness as a gospel testimony to the world
 - ✓ Because Christ prays for our oneness...
3. **Christ's Prays for Our **UNION** with Him in **ETERNITY** (vv. 24-26)**
 - ✓ Christ's desire is for our union with Him
 - ✓ Christ's desire is for our union with Him to complete His sending
 - ✓ Because Christ prays for our fellowship...

1. Christ Prays for US (v. 20)

• Christ prays for us as He prays for the 12

- ✓ The majority of the prayer of John 17 is Jesus' prayer for the 12 as He prepared for the cross, He did not stop with praying only for them — ***I do not ask on behalf of these alone.***
- ✓ His desire was for the preservation of the 12, but He was equally concerned for those who would follow after them — ***those who believe in Me through their word.***
 - They still needed to believe in Christ — only Christ will save, but the testimony of the 12 was means of salvation for everyone else. But to believe, they (we) needed a word (**Rom. 10:14-17**).
 - Most who followed never heard the 12 speak directly; but every believer is a result of a spiritual lineage that goes back to their testimony — either a verbal or written word about Jesus.
 - This is also a reminder of the importance of the gospel testimony and evangelism, something Jesus emphasized in this prayer (**vv. 21b, 25-26**).
 - We also are part of that lineage, so Christ had *us* on His mind as He went to the cross. Don't miss that — on the night of His betrayal, hours before He was nailed to the tree for my sins and your sins, He prayed for *you*. You, specifically, were on His mind as He went to the cross.
- ✓ It is also worth noting that Christ was praying on that day 2000 years ago (since He chose us in eternity, prior to creation, He has likely been praying for us eternally), and He has not stopped praying for us (and will not), "since He always lives to make intercession for [us]" (**Heb. 7:25**).
- ✓ One commentator observes, "The eye of Jesus scans the centuries, and presses to his loving heart *all* his true followers, *as if they had all been saved even at this very moment.*" [Hendriksen]

• Because Christ prays for us...

- ✓ *Be comforted.* The Lord who knows what you need, is powerful to give what you need, and is gracious and loving to desire to give what you need, is praying for your need. What do you need? He is praying for you; the heavens may seem silent, but be sure that He is praying for you.
- ✓ *Pray for each other.* Often there is nothing tangible to do when others are in need. We can't bear the pain of grief for each other; we can't give the gift of sleep; we can't substitute ourselves in a hospital bed for a loved one. But we can pray. We can intercede. Cf. **Rom. 1:9-10**; **Eph. 6:18-20**; **Col. 4:2-3**. We need prayer and we need to pray — for our own needs and for the needs of others.
- ✓ *Pray the prayers Christ prays for us.* We learn to pray by listening to and praying what He prays. It is not accidental that this long and intimate prayer of Jesus is in the Scriptures. It teaches us how.
- ✓ *Pray for the salvation of those who have not yet believed.* Even as the cross drew near, Christ was concerned for those who didn't yet believe, but needed to believe, and was cognizant of the need for boldness and a gospel witness — someone to speak. Pray that you or someone else might speak.

2. Christ Prays for Our UNION with ONE ANOTHER (vv. 21-23)

• Christ prays that we would be one (unified)

- ✓ The unity of believers was a recurring theme of Jesus' teaching in the Upper Room — note the emphasis on *one another* — 13:14, 35; 15:12-13, 17; 17:11.
- ✓ The emphasis in v. 21 is on *all* — the prayer and the emphasis on unity is all-inclusive. This is Christ's desire for every believer; and it should be the goal of every believer.
- ✓ When Jesus says, *that they may all be one*, what does He mean?
 - One thing to notice is that the words *all* and *one* are right next to each other in Jesus' word order: "so that all one they are." The great mass of all believers through all history are one body of Christ and one church.
 - Jesus is not asking the Father to make them "feel like they are one" (we often don't, but that doesn't change the reality of what we are). He is asking that the Father put the many individual believers together as one body and preserve them as one entity (cf. Eph. 4:4-6 — those are things that God does for us, not things that we do).
 - This does not mean that all people who *claim* to be Christians are united; this *is* a guarantee that those who are genuinely in Christ have been united together and are preserved as one body (Eph. 2:11-18 — note the repeated emphasis on union and oneness in that passage).
 - When Christ prays this prayer, He is praying in full accord with the Father's will, so this prayer (like all His prayers) is answered "YES" by the Father. This is what God has done. *We are one*.
- ✓ Now while he prays for the objective reality of our oneness (which was accomplished), the implication also then is that we should work to live out that oneness (Eph. 4:3, 15-16 — we preserve and live out the oneness that we have, but we don't create it).

• Christ prays that we would be one as an expression of the Trinity's oneness

- ✓ Jesus prays three times for the oneness and unity of believers as a reflection of the Trinity:
 - V. 21 — *that they may all be one, even as You, Father...* The Father is *in* the Son and the Son is *in* the Father and in that same manner, the unified body of Christ is in the Father and Son. We are included in their union. And our union is patterned after their union — indissoluble, with full joy, preserving the uniqueness of individual identity, but unified in purpose and love.
 - ... There is a difference, of course, because the Father, Son, and Spirit have this union as part of their essence — their eternal identity — where our union is spiritual.
 - ... But the union of the Trinity is the foundation of our union — it makes it possible.
 - ... "That stunning truth describes believers as those to whom the Son has given glory—that is, aspects of the very divine life that belongs to God. The church's task is to so live as to not obstruct that glory (Matt. 5:16)." [MacArthur, 292.]

➤ **V. 22** — *that they may be one, just as We are one.*

- ... Jesus is *glorious* — which means that He is above all things; singular in nature (cf. v. 5).
- ... The greatness of Christ's glory (which was a *gift* from the Father) was revealed in His humble Advent and work on the cross (12:23, 28, 33). And Christ has *given* that glory *to them* (us).
- ... More than the glory of forgiveness of and freedom from sin or the glory of Heaven, it is probable that the glory that Christ shares with us is the kind of humble service by which one lays down his life for a friend (15:12-15).
- ... And that glory that He give us — His life sacrificed for us and our lives in humble faith and service of Him, is what makes us *one* with each other and with the Father.
- ... This humble service is not a "penalty" from God; it is a means of honor and joy, even as it was honor and joy for Christ. Christ's humility did not break His union with the Father; our humility does not sever our unity to the Trinity — it is the means by which we become one.

➤ **V. 23** — *that they may be perfected in unity...even as you have loved Me.*

- ... We are *perfected* through our oneness with each other. That is, we are "completed" or "made mature" through our unity — we become "full grown" through unity (Eph. 4:16).
 - ... There is fulness of unity in the Trinity and the mature love each One has for the Other. In the same way, we will be brought to corporate maturity as we are unified (and live like we are unified with one another).
 - ... How do you know whether our church is maturing? By the unity and love we share. That's why disunity and lack of love is so damaging to a church — it destroys our testimony to the world (making a mockery of Christ), and inhibits the maturity of that church.
- ✓ As with so many other things in the spiritual life, our unity is not just about us individually. It's not even just about us corporately, to make things "nice" and "easy" (though things will be simplified when we are unified). Our unity is a picture of the Godhead. It reveals (glorifies) the nature of God.
 - ✓ And our unity is a gift to the church body as we become increasingly mature and complete.

• **Christ prays for our oneness as a gospel testimony to the world**

- ✓ In addition to picturing the relationship within the Trinity, our unity also serves as a gospel witness to the unbelieving world. Part of the purpose of our union with each other is as a testimony of Christ's divine origin and purpose — *so that the world may believe that You sent Me* (vv. 21, 23).
- ✓ One thing we are prone to forgetting is that "The church's unity is the foundation of its evangelism." [MacArthur] What God has done to unite us is a profound witness, when combined with words. When we live in disunity, giving a lie to our unity, it undermines and destroys our testimony.
- ✓ One difficulty of this unity is that it is a spiritual reality and is not easily observed. For instance, you know that I am united to Raye Jeanne because of the ring I wear, but even with that ring you don't know if we are truly one until you watch and observe our lives.

- ✓ This purpose clause (***so that***) has the same intent — we are to live in relationship with one another in such a way that it is readily discernable that we are united to one another. How can that be seen: through self-sacrifice, through commitment to common goals, by humbly giving up personal preferences, by purposefully using our gifts to serve others, and through intentionally building relationships (no hermits allowed, though 2020 has encouraged that).
- ✓ Maybe you've been thinking about how to increase your gospel influence this year (I hope); one way is by intentionally, purposefully living out your unity with fellow believers so that the world can see the difference Christ makes. (One way to do that is by humble confession & forgiveness.)
- ✓ Our unity is necessarily present and observable so that the world might come to believe.

- **Because Christ prays for our oneness...**

- ✓ When someone prays for you, isn't it comforting? Yes. But it is also instructive. Many times, as brothers have prayed for me, I've been reminded of priorities of things I have needed to do. The prayer is not just an encouragement to my weakness, it's an exhortation to my fleshliness. When we read this prayer that Jesus prays for us, we should hear both of those aspects as well — comfort for the weak, and exhortation and instruction for the fleshly and even rebellious.
- ✓ *We pray for oneness and unity.* Long before I came to GBC, I had one prayer for this church — its unity. And that has been the prayer I prayed the most for this church since I came. It's easy to pray; it's hard to do. [ASIDE: pray this for the Body, and pray it for individuals and families as well.]
- ✓ *We work for unity.* About 15-20 years ago, I was in a difficult meeting with a family and I was "making a stand," when the other elder in the meeting began working towards conciliation. After the meeting, he (rightly) observed, "You would have let them go...they would have walked away..." He was right. And he was right to work hard to preserve the unity. [ASIDE: again, unity will be preserved through humble confession, liberal forgiveness, and genuine restoration of fellowship.]
- ✓ *We work for unity with the goal of testifying to the world.* We love each other because we want unbelievers to believe so we will have more people to love.

3. Christ's Prays for Our UNION with Him in ETERNITY (vv. 24-26)

- **Christ's desire is for our union with Him**

- ✓ Some of you wrote out some goals for 2021 this week — you have some physical, spiritual, family, relational, and financial goals. Those goals reflect what you want. And maybe you will achieve some of them in the next 362 days.
- ✓ Jesus also has desires — one of them is given in v. 24 — ***they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am...*** There are several components to this desire:

- It is not a singular desire of Christ; it is a corporate desire of the Godhead — the Father *gave us* as a gift to the Son, so that we might belong to Him and worship and praise Him for eternity. You not only receive a gift from God, you *are* the gift from the Father to the Son. And if you have been given as part of that gift, you will not be lost along the way (Jn. 6:37-38).
- The desire is that we would be with Him. We were created for relationship with Him (Gen. 1:26ff). Christ came as Immanuel (Mt. 1:23) to restore that relationship. His ministry with the disciples was so that they would be with Him (Mk. 3:14).
 - ... And His return is the culmination of that plan to make us to be with Him — when He says, “I am coming” (Rev. 22:7, 12, 20) He means, “I am coming *to you*, to take you to be *with Me*.” And so we will be with Him (Rev. 22:3-5; 1 Thess. 4:17b).
 - ... The point of our being with Him is so that we can enjoy fellowship with Him — there is partnership and intimacy and delight (at a level unimaginable to us right now): “The greatest benefit of union with Christ is Christ. This marriage is made so that we may know and enjoy *him*. Union with him is the foundation: the *beginning*: communion with Him is the goal.” [Reeves, *Rejoicing in Christ*.] Our desire is not to be in Heaven, but to be *with Christ* (Phil. 1:23). “Salvation *is* Christ.” [Reeves] It is a desire to be live with and for Him.
- The reason He wants us with Him is *so that they may see my glory...*
 - ... Occasionally, some followers of God were given brief glimpses of God’s glory: Moses (Ex. 3; 34:33-35); Isaiah (Is. 6:1-9); Peter, James, John (Mk. 9:1-8); Paul (2 Cor. 12:2); John (Rev. 1:12-18). These were brief and fearful glimpses — even though they loved God.
 - ... Our perception of God’s glory will be eternal and joyful because we will be like Him (1 Jn. 3:2). We will be able to stand in the presence of God and see Him and not shrink back.
- This is a profound desire: “It is not difficult to understand believers wanting to be with Him; but it staggers the imagination to realize that He wants them to be with Him.” [MacArthur, 299.]
- Remember also that if the Son has a desire, it is in full agreement with the Father’s plan, and it will come to completion; so when the Son says, “I desire them to be with me,” we *will* be with Him. There is no possibility of failure in Jesus’ plans and desires. He *must* accomplish what He desires to do — He is incapable of fulfilling His desires.

- Christ’s desire is for our union with Him to complete His sending

- ✓ These requests (all through the prayer), Jesus makes to His *righteous Father* (v. 25).
 - Christ appeals to the sovereign will of the Trinitarian *Father* — the One with whom He is eternally in relationship and fellowship with as His Son.
 - Christ also appeals to Him as the one who is *righteous* — affirming His eternal commitment to do what is right and good. He will rightly apply Christ’s righteousness to believing sinners who are not righteous themselves and who are incapable of righteousness.
- ✓ These requests also flow out of the *love* that the Father and Son have for one another (v. 23, 24, 26).

- ✓ This love is an eternal commitment (*before the foundation of the world*) between Father and Son. It is permanent and full and incapable of degenerating or ending. And it is shared with those who belong to Christ (v. 26). The eternal love that exists between the Father and the Son is not only revealed to believers, but it is given to us and it operates in us. We live *by* that love and we live *for* that love (15:10-12; 1 Jn. 4:16-21).
- ✓ Notice the last phrase of the prayer: ***and I in them***. This is the end of His coming to earth; this was the purpose of His coming — to fill us with His love and to indwell us. We will live with Him in eternity, but already now He lives within us, directing, guiding, securing, and keeping us (Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27). And this love is not only in us individually, but among us as a corporate body.
- ✓ This revelation of His glory is also the completion of God’s purposes: “...Christ sees His covenant bond with His people to be so strong that He regards them in some sense as one with Himself. Consequently, He considers Himself to be incomplete without us. And so He lives in heaven not only for Himself in glory, but for us in order to bring us there. The knowledge of this brings a sense of refreshment, joy, and thrill to believers now, just as it did to Stephen on the day of his death.” [Ferguson, *John Owen*, 84.]

- **Because Christ prays for our union with Him...**

- ✓ *Pray for Heaven to come*. It is not accidental that the first request that Jesus teaches His disciples to pray is that “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.” (Mt. 6:10). We are reticent to pray that prayer because we are too attached to earth and not attached enough to Heaven (something that has been particularly revealed in 2020). But Heaven is not just “escape...”
- ✓ *Cultivate a longing for Christ in Heaven...* We have as our ambition to see Him and be made like Him. Long for that more than you long for anything else. When that longing captivates your heart, it will also transform your life now (1 Jn. 3:2). [ASIDE: if you can conceive of a Heaven without Christ, you may not be a believer, because the end of our salvation is the fulfillment of our fellowship with Him.]
- ✓ *Speak the gospel to those who aren’t (yet) going to Heaven*. It is a tragedy that people are dying from COVID. It is an infinitely greater tragedy that many more people are dying without Christ. Pray for gospel opportunities and pray to be those who reap a gospel harvest (Jn. 4:35ff). And be bold.

CONCLUSION: This has been a year of discouragement — both believers and unbelievers have experienced that temptation. This passage reminds us *to* pray and *how* to pray. And it reminds us of the One who is praying for us as well. Listen to the words of **Robert Murray M’Cheyne**:

“If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. Yet distance makes no difference. He is praying for me.” [Robert Murray M’Cheyne]

Friends — let’s be intentional to pray, remembering the One who prays for us.

BENEDICTION: **Ephesians 3:20-21**