

The Lord Prays for Unity

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Preacher: Malcolm Macdonald

[0 : 00] I'm going to begin our service this evening with the singing of Psalm 133 in Gaelic.

Psalm 133. Behold how good a thing it is, and how becoming well, together such as brethren are, in unity to dwell, like precious ointment on the head that down the bearded flow, even Aaron's beard unto the skirts that of his garments go.

As Hermon's Jew, the Jew that does, on Sion's hills descend, for there the blessing God commands, life that shall never end.

O fech, cymid ymachin ish, cymid ymdlach fharin. O fech, cymid ymdlach fharin, cymid ymdlach fharin.

O fech, cymid ymdlach fharin, cymid ymdlach fharin.

[1 : 57] O fech, cymid ymdlach fharin, cymid ymdlach fharin.

O fech, cymid ymdlach fharin. O fech, cymid ymdlach fharin. The End The End

The End The End The End

The End The End Let us join together in prayer. Let us pray.

O Lord, our God, as we bring our prayers, our petitions into your presence, we give thanks that, as our God, we have the assurance that you are able to hear our prayers, and not just hear them, but answer in accordance with wisdom that exceeds all human understanding.

[6 : 12]

And bring them under your care, we give thanks that you are the almighty God.

We give thanks to the Lord, and we give thanks to the Lord, and we give thanks to the Lord.

Amen.

[14 : 43] But unto every one of us is given grace according to the Lord, and we give thanks to the Lord, and we give thanks to the Lord, and we give thanks to the Lord, and we give thanks to the Lord.

Amen.

The end of the reading of the reading of his word, and we give thanks to the Lord, and we give thanks to the Lord.

praise. We're going to turn now for a short while to words that we have in the Gospel of John and chapter 17. This evening we're looking at the words that we have verse 20. John chapter 17 and verse 20. Neither pray I for these alone but for them also which shall believe on me through their word that they all may be one as thou father art in me and I in thee that they also may be one in us that the world may believe that thou hast sent me and the glory which thou gavest me I have given them that they may be one even as we are one I in them and thou in me that they may be made perfect in one and that the world may know that thou hast sent me and has loved them as thou hast loved me and so on. Well as many of you know we have been looking at John chapter 17 commonly given the name the High Priestly Prayer of Christ.

We continue our consideration of it and we need to remind ourselves that it is a prayer and not just a prayer but a prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ. And at this point in the prayer focus moves to fall upon those who believe in Jesus Christ through the preaching of the Apostles. He has just prayed for the Apostles but now his gaze as it were upon the church as a whole. As H.G. Moll has said the whole lot of believers in all their generations to the end.

[18 : 59] And surely there is a great comfort to you who believe to know and think that Jesus the Saviour called to his heavenly Father on your behalf.

With the capacity not just to generalize but to specify you the individual because you are numbered amongst those who believe.

This really is a truth that can only be appreciated if you believe. John Murray the theologian talks of the words of Romans 8 verse 32.

There we read He that spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all. How shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

Murray writes As all does not denote all mankind. Yet we must not overlook the indiscriminateness expressed. Within the scope of those embraced there is no restriction and exclusion.

[20 : 15] Each person has his own individuality. Each person has his own individuality. And this is true in respect of sin, misery and liability. God does not save man in the mass. He deals with each individual in his particularity.

Now these words have a context obviously. But they also are relevant to the words we are looking at here. Where focus falls upon unity and the need for it.

But before that I think we must take account of the fact that the belief of which he speaks is directly attributed to the word.

The word which he gave to the apostles and which the apostles then gave to the believer. It seems plain from the teaching of scripture that it is by means of the word that men and women ordinarily come to faith.

Paul again writes Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. And as he writes these words in Romans 10. We find a logical chain. All who call upon the name of Christ, he says, will be saved.

[21 : 41] But how can they call upon the name of Christ, he says, will be saved. But how can they call on somebody if they do not believe in him? How can they believe if they have not heard of him? How can they hear if someone does not tell them about him?

And how can they tell or preach if they are not sent? At the heart of what Paul has to say is the centrality of the word. Jesus wants the word to be preached in order that it may be believed.

Even in this time of pandemic, where there are limited gatherings of God's people and limitations placed upon these gatherings, one thing cannot be limited, and that is the word in its fullness.

We are required to preach the whole counsel of God. And even though efforts are being made, no matter how surreptitiously, to prevent the proclamation of the word in its fullness, this word cannot be restricted.

It cannot be curtailed. Because it is through the word that Christ means men and women to hear of him, and by hearing to come to faith.

[23 : 01] The second thing we can draw attention to here is the petition for unity. We read these words in verse 21.

A unity like this.

Secondly, that they may be one in us. Unity with us. And then in verse 22.

And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one. Again, glory that they may be one, even as we are one.

Because of the example given, there seems to be a reluctance to accept, on one hand, the simplicity of what is sought.

[24 : 18] Jesus cannot be asking the believer to be united to fellow believers, in the same way union exists within the Trinity. This is a union that is the preserve of the Godhead.

We were taught, some of us anyway, the words of the Shorter Catechism. The question being, how many persons are there in the Godhead? And the answer, there are three persons in the Godhead.

The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. And these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory. Clearly, in this passage, the Lord is not teaching us that by believing this will be true of all believers.

It cannot be possible. But yet there is something that is brought to our attention that marks out the believer. Warren Wiersbe, for example, speaks of it in terms of identifying characteristics.

For example, all who believe have come to trust the same Saviour. They enjoy or experience the same love to that Saviour.

[25 : 39] They bear testimony to that Saviour. These are characteristics that speak of what they are or what they will be.

Ultimately, they will enjoy the same glory. They will be in heaven with Christ. Don Carson writes, Similarly, the believers, still distinct, are to be one in purpose, in love.

In action, undertaken with and for one another. In joint submission to the revelation received, the word of which we spoke.

Now, without question, many have considered these words and noted the decidability of them being accomplished. But they have erred because in their approach their concern was for external unity.

Perhaps emphasis falling on uniformity. Whereas in the case of ecclesiastical ecumenism, to make things easier, to remove all elements that debarred unity.

[27 : 17] And make as broad and as fluid as possible the church to which they belong. But as Warren Weir goes on to write, Jesus did not pray for a temporary artificial uniformity that would probably impress people.

He prayed for a permanent, sincere unity that would bear witness to Jesus Christ and prove to the world that he was sent by God.

The existence of unity within the body of Christ, within a Christian fellowship, is a sure sign of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit.

It was true of the early church that they demonstrated their unity by their love to one another. And the world saw it and recognized it, even though they might not have understood it.

There is clearly not a better witness to the world of the existence and the power of Christ the Saviour. And it must be said, where there is discord, the world are only too ready to cite that as evidence to the contrary.

[28 : 36] But again, remind yourself of this fact. Jesus is praying to the Father for this. Not only does it suggest to us how valuable it is, but also how much it is under threat in the world.

A number of the commentators deliberately, or maybe accidentally, make reference to the privilege we have of hearing the Son speak to the Father.

As if he was on one side of the Father. As if he was on one side of the curtain and we on the other eavesdropping. And if you think of the role of the High Priest, only once a year would he pass from view on the Day of Atonement.

And he would go into the temple and go behind the veil, unseen in his activity from the world.

From the church even, that were apprehensively waiting the outcome of his visit. But he would perform various acts as the intercessor of the people.

[29 : 47] But Paul the Apostle suggests on more than one occasion that the saints of God should be identified by their solidarity.

We read in the epistle to the Ephesians these words. Paul is referring here not just to the world.

The work of the ministry which has as its ultimate goal the unity of faith. There is much more in what Paul has to say. But truly there is this, that which Christ is praying for.

Charles Hodge, a theologian, writes, The church is now and ever has been one body. But how imperfect their union. Our Lord's prayer, that his people may be one, does not prove that they are not now one.

The unity of faith will result in the fullness that saving faith brings in its conclusions. They experience unity as believers.

[31 : 20] And only by believing the one sent by God is their unity truly marked for what it is. The result of Christ being the one sent by God to achieve that final end.

With which we will conclude the prayer next week. But here, as we saw in verse 23. Jesus says, I in them and thou in me, that they be made perfect in one.

But that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them as thou hast loved me. There is a union with Christ by faith.

And that union with Christ brings them into fellowship with God the Father and through the God the Son. And there is a union there that is undeniable.

And the more it is evidenced, the more it is witnessed, the more the world can conclude that there is something there that needs to be explained or explored.

[32 : 31] It is yet to be fully realised in the experience of those who are united by faith to Christ. But Jesus is praying to the Father that the day will come that the world will know that you have sent me, he says.

And has loved them as you have loved me. May God encourage us to think on these words. And to think about how they are realised in our own individual experience.

And our experience of being one with others who have shared that experience with us. May God bless to us these thoughts. Let us pray. Lord our God, we give thanks for what we are able to enjoy by virtue of the faith that is.

Those by reason of Christ being in us. We give thanks for the saving faith that belongs to your people at Maximout.

That rests and receives Christ Jesus as the alone Saviour. We pray that you would encourage your people to enjoy the privileges that are afforded them through union with them.

[34 : 05] And also seek and to emphasise the privileges and the benefits of being united with others of the same, self-same faith.

Bless us, we pray, remembering all we commit to your care. Continuing with us, in our may grace, mercy and peace from God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Be with you all now and always. Amen.