

John 17:20-26

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[0 : 0 0] That's chapter 17 of John's gospel, verses 20 through 26. If you're able, please stand with us as we read the word of God.

And it reads like this. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

The glory that you have given me, I have given to them, that they may be one, even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and love them, even as you love me.

Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you love me before the foundations of the world.

O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them.

[1 : 2 7] This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. What a joy to be together on this August morning.

I can believe it's August already. Would you pause and let's ask for the Lord's help this time. Father, we come to you and we sit under your word, that we are not those who stand above it or even equal to it, but we live under its rule and its reign in our lives.

And so would you soften our hearts. May these words, may your words fall upon receptive minds and hearts and hands.

Empower us to live for you. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. There are few things in the Christian life that are more encouraging than knowing someone is praying for you.

When a loved one prays for you, your heart settles from anxiety. I cannot tell you how my soul was fortified by the prayers of my mom and dad.

[2 : 5 5] I recall vividly, beginning in middle school, even high school, I would wake up earlier because in those days I had a shower before I went to school because beforehand you didn't, before when you were in elementary school, you just never had to shower.

But in elementary, in junior high and high school, waking up early to shower and to put myself together, I would hear early, while it was still dark, the mumbling of my mom and dad.

They were not talking to one another, but they were speaking to God on my behalf. It was powerful. And as we come to this morning's passage, we are told that Jesus prayed for you.

Jesus prayed for you. Jesus prayed for me. Jesus prays for us. And I'll argue that Jesus continues to pray for us.

It may come to a surprise to some of us that Jesus prays for us, but it's the clear teaching of our text this morning. Perhaps you've envisioned Jesus seated and enthroned in heaven.

[4 : 07] But he does not merely sit inactively watching from afar. The writer of the book of Hebrews tells us that he lives to intercede for you and I.

John records for us Jesus praying.

You see that in verse 1 of chapter 17. And it's interesting, this is the final prayer before he goes to the cross. The other gospel writers tell us that this prayer is situated in the Garden of Gethsemane, and it's filled with agony.

But John actually leaves that out. And if this is the same prayer, John records not Jesus' sorrow, but actually Jesus' supplication on behalf of the saints.

One writer has called it the Lord's Prayer. It is right and correct to envision Jesus seated and enthroned. But I cannot help but envision every now and then, probably more often or not, on occasion, Jesus rising from his position, only to fall back to his knees in prayer.

[5 : 30] Jesus is a praying Jesus. Well, we've seen this prayer unfold in the 17th chapter of the book of John. His prayer opens up with this petition to glorify God.

It's last week we saw that his prayer continued for the 11, the 11 apostles asking for their protection and their consecration.

And this morning, Jesus' attention turns to you and I. What would he ask? What were his desires? What does Jesus, the Son of God, pray for?

And our time this morning will be marked by two headings. The first is this. Jesus prays for our earthly unity. Jesus prays for our earthly unity.

Secondly, Jesus prays for our heavenly destiny. Our unity and our destiny. I will spend a majority of our time on the first point.

[6 : 31] So once I get done with that first point, you might be thinking, wow, he's only halfway out. The majority of the time will be on that first point. So I will. So just note that.

Jesus prays for our earthly unity. Verses 20 to 23. The prayer is aimed for every subsequent generation of believers that would come to faith in Christ.

Verse 20 is quite explicit. He's referred to the original apostles. Now he turns to future believers who would actually proceed or come out from these 11.

The disciples, according to verse 18, were the sent ones. And the promise in verse 20 is that they were going to be successful in their mission. For the disciples who overheard this prayer, it must have been jolting and ensuring God was going to make something of their lives.

Jesus depicts great confidence that the fold would exceed the first 11. Their witness would be effective. The fishermen who left catching fish were assured they would catch men.

[7 : 40] The tax collector among them who extorted lives would now tell others of new life. The zealots in the band of disciples, there were some, would no longer be nationalistic in their endeavors, but be Christocentric in their efforts.

Christosim, an early church father, notes, it must have been a great encouragement for the apostles. They would cause the salvation of others. They would be the cause of the salvation of others.

And as a result, we know believers would emerge, just not a handful limited to the region of Palestine, ancient Palestine, not just a handful limited to the first century, not just a handful limited to a time or space, but what would burgeon into billions, founded upon every continent, in various times, under various circumstances, in fulfillment to God's promise that he was assembling a people that no one can number.

And what's interesting about this people is they're not uniform. They're not clones of one another. Rather, they would be the most diverse collection ever assembled.

Every social category would be represented. Every spoken language will be represented. Every skin shade will be accounted for.

[9 : 04] The wealthy and the poor. The young and the old. The smart, clever, dumb, less smart. Male, female, young, old.

And it is to this group you and I belong. And with this assembly in mind, Jesus offers up his first petition.

Verse 21. You have it there. It's the heart of the petition. It's three times mentioned. That they may all be one.

Reiterated in verse 22. That they may be one. Refortified in verse 23. That they may become perfectly one.

Jesus prays for our oneness. Our unity. When all the world in these days is moving toward fragmentation, segmentation, Jesus prays that his people, his bride, his church, will move toward unification.

[10 : 09] He desires our earthly unity. How are we to understand this unity? What brings it about? What makes it happen?

I just want to make a few observations about unity from this text. Note that this unity is doctrinally rooted.

And by that, I mean we are brought together by a common confession. A shared set of teachings. An apostolic word. We are those, according to the text, that believe in Jesus through the word of the apostles.

According to Jesus, we will believe through the apostles' word, which incidentally are Jesus' words in verse 8, that he's heard from the Father in verse 3.

These are the words we fasten ourselves to. Some people ask, well, why is it so necessary that we emphasize the teaching of the Bible in the congregation of Christ Church Chicago?

[11 : 17] Why? Because we hold in it that in the apostles' teaching, in the Bible, contains the gospel as taught by the apostles. Why do we need to hold fast to the word?

Because the word brings unity. A common word brings about the fastening together of the people of God. There is a church in the neighborhood, in our neighborhood, which boasts that it is an assembly without a creed.

An assembly without a shared word or common confession. Their website reads, We welcome all who seek a religious home free of creeds, guided by love, reason, and conscience.

We are a delightful mix of races, cultures, and beliefs. We are a unity in a diversity. For John, this would have been bewildering.

Unity does not come at the expense of the apostolic message, the apostolic creed, so to say. Rather, it is the apostolic message that brings unity.

[12 : 27] Therefore, we as Christ Church sit under this commitment to the apostolic teaching, the Bible in its fullness. We echo the conviction of Jude. We are those who contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.

We believe this is a delivered message. Paul will say the same thing when he writes his letter to the church at Corinth. For I delivered, delivered to you this message.

It came from Jesus to the apostles and has been delivered to you and I. It has been passed down and handed down and preserved.

This is the apostolic message. This brings unity. Additionally, this unity is not only doctrinally rooted, but it's divinely grounded.

Divinely grounded. Anchored in God himself. It is rooted in the unity of the Father and the Son. You've seen it in these passages. Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, may they also be in us.

[13 : 38] May they be one even as you and I are one. Our unity is a derived unity from the Father and the Son. Our unity flows out of the community of the Godhead.

Three persons in one God. The Bible defends one God in three persons. Three persons. The Bible asserts.

In other words, we have a unity because God is a triunity. We are beneficiaries of it. We receive salvation that originated from the Father that was accomplished by the Son that is being applied through the Spirit.

This is the relationship of abundant love and unity that overflows into every believer. It's divinely grounded. It's not only divinely grounded, it's divinely given.

It's not something you can find on earth. How do I know this? Because Jesus prays for it. If Jesus knew you could find this unity on this planet, there was no reason He would need to ask God for it.

[14 : 47] Instead, He asks God to grant them unity because He Himself knows it is a gift. It's a divine gift that can't be humanly generated.

It is not obtainable without God giving it. It's so fascinating. The greatest unity you can experience on earth is a gift from heaven. We unite based on various things.

Shared hobbies, shared interests, mutual affection, race, gender, political alignment, interest groups, shared mission, ambition.

The list goes on and on and on. Yet, this is not the unity that Jesus speaks of. Rather, it is something that is given exclusively to the church. It is founded in the divine community of God.

You see, therefore, this unity in the biblical senses is this realm that is only open to you and I as Christians. It's foreign to the world. It cannot be had apart from God.

[15 : 54] But, there have been occasions in my life that I have been approached for counsel.

It's between a male and a female and one of them, lo and behold, loves the Lord Jesus. The other chooses not to love the Lord Jesus.

And they come to me as a couple and they say, will you marry us? And what I want to say, I'll say a lot of things, but from this passage what I want to say is this.

That that couple, though they may love each other intensely, fervently, and there are many who make it, i.e. my parents, there is, when they enter that marriage union, one as a believer and one as an unbeliever, they miss out on this divine unity that is only granted to Christians.

I'm not saying they can't love each other. I'm not saying they shouldn't get married. I'm not saying that it won't work out. But what I'm saying is from this passage, the greatest gift of uniting people is missed out on if one chooses to go that route.

[17 : 25] You see, this is, you and I may have experienced this. Perhaps you enter into a conversation not knowing an individual on a plane, in a laboratory, in a classroom.

You're talking to one another and you begin to sense, get the strange hunch, oh, I think they're a Christian. And you discover that they are and your heart jumps and your countenance is lifted.

Why? Because you sense this bond that goes deeper than that conversation. Because without explanation, you have been all of a sudden supernaturally adhered to one another.

There is a spiritual glue that is bonding you together. This is why you can go abroad and sit in a worship context that you understand no word, but you delight in being there.

This is why you can sit at a meal and your conversation may break down because of communication barriers or language barriers. But you're spiritually bonded together.

[18 : 28] Why? Because at its core, God's love is in us. Verse 23 and verse 26 reiterate that you both have experienced this transformative love of God.

There is certainly something unifying that I could sit down with a total stranger and when I find out that they are a Christian, my heart delights and is immediately bonded together.

Why? Because there is something so magnificent and so heavily shared that that person across the table is smitten with the same love of God that I am.

There is, when you experience the love of God poured out in your heart and you find another individual who has that same love love in them, that brings you and I together.

This is the exclusive experience of the Christian, both having experienced the redemptive love of God and having experienced that the result is clear according to the passage, this unity serves as an apologetic to the world.

[19 : 44] This is the great Christian apologetic. I would like to think it's preaching, but according to this passage, it is the unity of God's people.

This is the very argument of God's existence. A few years ago, all four congregations of Holy Trinity Church, of which we were once part, we assembled together in Rockefeller Chapel.

Hundreds, close to a thousand of us were there, I think, to celebrate 20 years of the Lord's faithfulness. I had, we as a church, turn 20. I had many conversations that day, but one conversation is noteworthy.

As we were shuffling into Rockefeller, a staff member who was working the event for the university turns to me, and I remember she looks at me perplexed and amazed, and she asked me, how did you get such a diverse group of people together?

How did you get such a diverse group of people together? I knew her religious background. She had little frame of reference for what she was observing, and she, her question, showed that she needed help to process what she saw.

[21 : 07] Maybe it was a marketing ploy, or some strategy we implemented, and she wanted to know. And the answer is, or was, and will continue to be, the gospel does this.

The gospel does this. This is what the gospel does. This is the unity brought about by knowing the triune God. God is most glorified when his people are unified.

God is made known when his people are one. In my study this past week, I came across a poignant statement. It reads this way, evangelism is a community act.

Evangelism is a community act. It is the proclamation of the church's relationships, as well as her convictions. The gospel is proclaimed from a pulpit.

It's either confirmed and immeasurably enhanced, or it is contradicted and immeasurably weakened by the quality of the relationships in the pews. Every time we gather together, digitally, virtually, physically, we either strengthen or weaken the evangelistic appeal of the church.

[22 : 27] When you assemble, keep in mind that as you assemble, you proclaim a message to the world.

And this is why we have a commitment, a conviction, something at our core, that we are most blessed when we are the most diverse.

And I'm not only speaking about color, or age, or gender, I'm talking about spectrums, red and blue, young and old, clever and not so bright.

When we're all assembled together, the world marvels, because it is so foreign. Jesus prays for our earthly unity.

Secondly, he prays for our heavenly destiny. Verses 24 to 26, in verse 24, he expresses the desire that one day you and I would be where Jesus is.

[23 : 33] This is in many ways a reiteration of John chapter 14, where he says, in my father's house, there are many rooms, and I'm going to go and prepare a place for you, and I will come again, and I will take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also.

Interestingly, this is not really a prayer request from Jesus. It's far more an expression of the will of God. As this prayer winds down, it would be for an encouragement to the disciples that when it's all said and done, they would be with Jesus.

They would be eternally secure. That the great shepherd would not lose any of them. The perfect keeper of children would not abandon any of them.

Their eternal destiny would be with Jesus. And though Jesus would be betrayed shortly, crucified, buried, and raised, and he would leave, the disciples would be left without their Jesus.

And some even succumb to martyrdom and death. The note of this prayer would forever resound. They would be with Jesus. They would behold him in his splendor.

[24 : 44] They would gaze upon his majesty. No longer would he be veiled in human flesh, but he would be unveiled in divine glory. You see, the culmination of all things, of everything, of all of history, is this, in verse 24.

Verse 24 is the final fruition of Jesus' desires. It is the culmination of the mission of God. Sure, redemption was accomplished on the cross, but in this passage, Jesus is envisioning the outcome of redemption, which is a giant regathering.

Every name he muttered before the Father, every individual he stood as an advocate for, everyone that received the love of Jesus would be with him and behold him where he was.

Jesus, granted, Jesus shortly would no longer be with them, but now, according to verse 26, he would be embedded in them through the Spirit.

The prayer ends, and you and I are left with the statement in verse 26, I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, and the love with which you loved me may be in them, and I in them.

[26 : 16] The prayer ends with this request that the love of God would be in them, and Jesus would be in them. The closing statement is for you and I to know that we are loved by God.

May I remind you this morning that God loves you. God loves you. He loves the Christian. He loves you when you are at your worst.

He loves you when things are the darkest. He loves you when gloom fills your heart. He loves you in your shame. He loves you despite your inadequacies.

He loves you in your failings. He loves you when you have fallen. He loves you. And if I'm reading this last verse in his prayer properly, what needs to be made clear this morning is that God loves you.

He loves you in the same way that he loves his son. he loves you in the same way that he loves his son.

[27 : 27] And it is with this note that Jesus' prayer concludes. And it only sets up these final chapters in the book of John's gospel. John is setting up what unfolds next.

He's saying God loves you. God loves And you have no idea what is about to happen. You have no idea, little idea, that he would be betrayed and arrested.

He would be tried and beaten. He would be delivered over and crucified. And it would be all, it would all happen in order to display the fact that God loves you.

That God loves you. it's incredible. John positions the passion narrative by situating right on his front end with this fact that Jesus' desire is for you to experience the love of God in here.

And he is going to show you. It's incredible. It is the pen ultimate display of love. It would display the love of God for the people of God.

[28 : 38] Love was the catalyst. Love was the compulsion for the cross. That is why the Bible says, but God shows his love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

God's mission was sending Jesus to prove that he loves you. He loves you.

Well, we're done. I'm done. And there is an opportunity.

Our service will continue in the new building shortly after this one winds down. there is an opportunity for you to remind yourself of that love.

[29 : 39] To reenact what God has so prescribed in taking communion together. And so I invite you 6154 South Woodlawn immediately after the service.

Maybe not immediately. Go slow so I can get there first. But when you hold that bread, and when you drink that cup and the Bible says you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes, that death was motivated by his love for you.

Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my heart.