

That They May Be One

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 April 2023

Preacher: Joshua Winters

[0 : 00] We're going to move now into our time in God's Word together. If you have your Bible with you, you can open it up to John chapter 17. For those of you who are visiting or new, we have been traveling through the Gospel of John.

It's been some years now since we started that journey. And we're really taking our time because we really want to come to terms with what God is saying to us through John about Jesus.

So as we pick up the story here, we're in chapter 17. It's the night of Jesus' betrayal. Jesus has had his last supper with the disciples.

Judas has left to begin enacting his betrayal. And Jesus has been taking time to talk to the disciples. He's been giving them words of encouragement and comfort, instruction, promise, warning.

All to help carry them through the difficult things that are about to happen. And we saw as all of a sudden the disciples just have this like aha moment.

[1 : 07] Now we understand what you're talking about, Jesus. And very soon after that, Jesus begins to pray right there in front of them. And the content of his prayer is chapter 17.

We heard already how his prayer began. Jesus expressed his longing to be restored to the glory that he had with the Father before the world began.

And then we heard him go on to pray for his disciples, reflecting on how they have responded well to his word. They have believed. And he prayed for their protection.

Because Jesus says, I'm going out of the world. But they are going to remain here. So protect them, Father. We're going to pick up Jesus' prayer in verse 15 of chapter 17.

Jesus prays, My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.

[2 : 12] Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

For them, I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. Now we're going to zip through these first couple verses, verses 17 to 19.

These are some difficult words to understand. We've got that strange biblical word, sanctify. And we've got some differences in the translations. Is it by the truth or is it in the truth?

And what does that even mean? And then we've got Jesus telling the Father that he has sanctified himself for them. There are many pages of commentaries written on these few verses and differing interpretations and opinions.

So I'm just going to skip over some of that and share briefly with you my take on it. My take on these verses is that Jesus is praying a prayer of dedication for the apostles.

[3 : 19] A prayer to consecrate them, sanctify them, and set them apart for your special service, your special work. And that work or that service for the apostles is to speak the very words of God and to bear witness to Jesus.

There seems to be a bit of a parallel here in verses 18 and 19. Jesus draws that parallel between himself and them. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

For them I sanctify myself that they too may be truly sanctified. And so he prays, sanctify them. Jesus has set himself apart, dedicating himself to that special service of God.

And now he's praying that God would do the same for them, set them apart for his special work and service. So that's my take on those verses.

Now we come to a bit of a shift in Jesus' prayer. Let's read it in verse 20. Jesus says, My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.

[4 : 32] So this signals a shift in Jesus' prayer. This statement sort of clues us in that up until now, Jesus has mainly been praying for the 11, the apostles who are with him.

And now he kind of expands the circle to include all who will come to believe in Jesus through their word, their message. Now I want to be careful here.

I think that there is probably two mistakes that we can make. One mistake is to assume that everything Jesus has prayed so far up until now is a sort of general, indiscriminate prayer for all of his followers of all time.

But verse 20 here makes it clear. There's a bit of a dividing line here. It's mainly the disciples who are with him that he has been praying for up until now. They are the ones who up till now in the story have believed and accepted and obeyed Jesus' words as Jesus described in verses 6 to 8.

They are the ones whom the world has hated as Jesus describes in verse 14. And they are the ones whom Jesus has sent into the world as he describes in verse 18.

[5 : 47] That word sent, by the way, goes back to in the original language. It's apostello from which we get our designation apostle. So we might be mishandling Jesus' words, I think, if we just take them all as a sort of general prayer for all of his followers for all time.

The second mistake, that being said, is to assume that everything that Jesus has prayed so far applies only to the apostles and has no relevance for us who believe today.

And I think this we just know. We know that Jesus doesn't just want protection for these 11 men, but that he desires it for all his people.

He's already said, I am the good shepherd and taught that he wards off the thief and the wolves. Similarly, we know that Jesus doesn't just have a purpose for the apostles remaining in the world, but for all who will come to believe in him remaining here in the world.

That each one of us would fulfill our unique purpose, our unique role in the body of Christ. So just to sum that up, once again, there's two errors that we can make here, I think.

[7 : 01] Where did that come from? We could assume that everything Jesus prays in these first verses, he prays indiscriminately for all believers. Or we could assume that nothing he prays in these verses reflects his heart and prayers for all of us.

Let's continue on. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father.

Just as you are in me, and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

So Jesus makes this grand request of his Father. He asks that all of them, all who will come to believe in him, that's the whole Christian church, that all of them may be one.

Up until now, what is it that's been holding this rag-tag bunch of men and women from Galilee and Judea together?

[8 : 21] Jesus has been the uniting factor. But now, as Jesus has said many times, he's leaving. He's going to the Father.

And all of his followers, and all who will yet become his followers, they're going to still be here. They're remaining in the world. They're going to have to face trials and temptation.

They're going to have to figure out how to live as his followers, even with their many differences. You've got Jew and Gentile, slave and free, rich and poor.

And they're going to have to figure out how to do all this in the face of hostility and persecution, because as the story went, the religious leaders of the Jews continued to persecute and go after Christ's followers.

And so is it any surprise that Jesus asks the Father for the oneness of his people, that they would remain united, together, undivided?

[9 : 30] Now, I'll be honest. Sometimes I think we look at this prayer and we wonder, what happened? Why hasn't God answered this prayer? I mean, look at the world today. Look at the church, all the denominations today.

But I got thinking about this. Maybe we're looking at it the wrong way. Is it possible that God has been answering this prayer all along?

Let's think about how things unfolded. Jesus, the leader, was crucified. And the disciples were scattered. But that wasn't the end of the story.

They all came back together again and became witnesses of the risen Christ. The disciples were opposed and persecuted by the religious leaders.

But did they become so divided that they all just turned away and abandoned following Jesus? No. No. The apostles would later be arrested for proclaiming Jesus in the streets of Jerusalem.

[10 : 38] And I'm reminded what Gamaliel, the Pharisee, said in the assembly that day while they were all there on trial. He stood up and said, some time ago, Thutis appeared claiming to be somebody.

And about 400 men rallied to him. He was killed. All his followers were dispersed and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas, the Galilean, appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt.

He too was killed and all his followers were scattered. Therefore, in the present case, in the case of these 11 men, the apostles, I advise you, leave these men alone.

Let them go. For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men.

You will only find yourselves fighting against God. Gamaliel was right. Without the leader alive, things like these fizzle out.

[11 : 46] Followers get into fights and divide and it all comes to nothing. But that's not what happened with the followers of Jesus. 2,000 years later, we still haven't fizzled out.

We're still here. We still believe in Jesus. We still love him. We still love his words. Yes, we still get into fights sometimes and arguments and even divide.

But every true believer knows by the testimony of God's Spirit living in them that they are part of the one body of Christ. That he is alive and that he will someday unify us deeply, powerfully, and permanently.

That from every tribe and tongue and nation and people on earth, we will stand before the throne of God and the Lamb and worship with one voice saying, salvation belongs to our God.

So back to Jesus' request. He prays, asking the Father to make all his followers one. And as we look at how the story continues, it's a prayer that God has been answering.

[13 : 02] It didn't all fizzle out and come to nothing as movements of men usually do. Just the opposite. The church has been growing and spreading ever since that day to every corner of the world, uniting people of all different kinds.

I invite you to look around the room here this morning. Look at how different we are. Some of us younger, some of us older.

Some of us born and raised in rural Saskatchewan, some from the cities in Ontario, some from China, some here with disabilities and health problems, some with good health, some single, some parents, some empty nesters, some who love sports and some who couldn't care less about them.

If we were to sit down and tease out all our differences, I think the list would probably blow us all away. Like, why are we here in this room together today? It's because of Jesus.

So God is answering this prayer that we would be one. And this is not the end of the story. Someday, the Bible tells us that Jesus will be revealed in glory and that every eye will see his glory.

[14 : 30] In the same way, all of us who believe in Christ Jesus will be revealed in glory with him. The one body of Christ. Paul said it this way in Colossians 3, verse 4.

He said, when Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. That's a you plural, by the way.

Now let's consider for a moment the kind of unity that Jesus is asking for. He says, I pray that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.

May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me that they may be one as we are one.

I in them and you in me so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

[15 : 48] Every time I read that, it blows me away. Like this is next level unity. This is an out of this world kind of unity.

The kind of unity that Jesus asks the Father for on our behalf is the same sort of unity that he has with the Father. Father. He says that they may be one just as you are in me and I am in you, Father.

I think this is our clue right here that this request will not be fully answered until the end when Jesus returns.

in order for us to be united this deeply with God the Father and God the Son and with each other we need to be perfected finally and forever.

We need sin to be out of the equation gone and dealt with forever. The way Jesus prays this here you know it opens up a whole new vantage point for meditation.

[17 : 10] Our unity with each other as believers will someday reflect the unity that Christ has right now with his Father.

And so now we need to go back and we need to restart the sermon series go back through John we need to look at this relationship that Jesus has with his Father and that amazing unity that's there it's breathtaking it's wonderful it's mysterious we've seen that all the way through how Father and Son speak and work together purpose together honoring one another acting in perfect harmony always aware of each other your will be done not mine and yet not unaware of their own desires and this is a picture of how it will be between me and you brothers and sisters in Christ it's wonderful there's coming a great and grand display of the glory of God and part of that display will be you and me and all who believe in Christ living together in perfect unity the kind that Jesus has right now with his father it's amazing and this is God's purpose for this unity this oneness he prays that all of them may be one so that the world may believe that you have sent me he goes on and gives another rationale a little further down in verse 23 then the world will know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me so twice we hear

Jesus express the purpose the grand result of our unity in Jesus we are to become in our unity a sign to the world a testimony to the world that yes God really did send Jesus and yes God really has loved us people of the world Paul tells us in Romans that the world acts wickedly suppressing the truth distorting the truth denying the truth but someday God in answer to Jesus prayer here will give the world another great sign that breaks through that suppression and undeniably proves yes this Jesus we've been proclaiming all along he really did come from the father and he really has loved us people of the world so what is

Jesus saying here let me just sum it up for us this morning he's praying for all who will come to believe in his name the whole Christian church and he's asking God for their unity unity not just some kind of a visible charade that we put on for the world to see but he's asking for that deepest possible unity a unity that reflects his unity with the father he asks that we would be joined to one another and to the father and to him as deeply as he is joined to his father such that we are in God in Christ and he is in us and the glory of Jesus Christ he says is to be given to us revealed in us and our unity is to be proof to the world that God sent Jesus and in doing so truly loved the world this is what Jesus is thinking about this is what's on his heart the night before his crucifixion he's been thinking back and longing for that glory that he had with God before the world began and at the same time he's also looking ahead to the end of this world story to the day when his glory will be shared with his people the ones that he's about to die to save it's a magnificent glimpse for us who believe in the name of

Jesus so what do we do with all this well first of all if you're here this morning and you haven't put your trust in Jesus yet let me urge you to do that today Jesus prayed for all who would come to believe in him through the message of his apostles in this gospel of John he is one of those apostles do you hear what Jesus prayed do you see Jesus heart of love for his people wanting them all to be united together and to share in his glory and so if you've not yet put your full trust in Jesus let me urge you to do that today only those who believe in him will share in his glory when he comes again it's free it's a gift of

[22 : 59] God's good generosity second there's a personal obligation that we all have in response to these words Jesus prays for the unity of his people he longs for it he desires it and so I think we must carefully and prayerfully ask ourselves this question Lord have I been contributing to division and disunity in my church have I been bringing those attitudes that cause conflict and disunity an attitude of superiority pride a selfish attitude the desire to have my way despite what others want or desire am I combative prone to arguing debating proving my point being right what about anger am I harboring bitterness and unforgiveness against someone in the church

I pray that each one of us would soberly ask this question Lord have I been contributing to the division and disunity the tension the conflict in my church through my attitude my actions further growing in unity requires more than just self-examination we must go beyond a broken and contrite heart to action Jesus said blessed are the peacemakers not the peace wishers the peacemakers there's action there Matthew 5 verse 9 he said if your brother or sister sins against you go to them Matthew 18 15 and Luke 17 3 go to them too often we cower in fear or we stand aloof in pride and we just let the grievance fester and so we should ask this question

Lord have I been acting to bring about peace resolution reconciliation in my church as I should is there a conversation that I need to have with someone here in the church in the quest for Christian unity we must first deal with ourselves am I hindering that unity am I helping that unity then we can start to think about unity outside the walls of our church outside the borders of our church many point to this prayer of Jesus and they ask why don't we all just come together and become one church here in Davidson one church around the world you might think that that's a philosophical question but I hear it regularly isn't that what Jesus was asking for this is the cry of the ecumenical movement but the problem with the ecumenical movement is that it aims to achieve unity without building that unity on a proper foundation if you go to the world council of churches website you'll find one thing totally missing there's no statement of faith there's no statement of beliefs they're calling out for all

Christians everywhere to be on the way to visible unity in one faith but there's no definition of what that one faith is what is that one shared set of beliefs that will bring us all together they won't define it they won't put words on it because as soon as you start to put words on it that visible unity evaporates it's gone and so we must be constantly carefully doing as the reformers did we must be going back to the source back to the words of Jesus back to the inspired authoritative words of the men he sent the apostles we go back to the bible and amazingly when we do that we find that this one faith of which the apostle Paul speaks in Ephesians 4 verse 5 is quite well defined here in the words of Jesus and in the words of the men he sent the apostles in fact holding fast to these words became the litmus test it became the measure of a faithful shepherd like Timothy 1st

Timothy 4 verse 16 it became the qualification for someone to serve as an elder in the church 1st Timothy 3 verse 9 and Titus 1 verse 9 it's the good deposit that pattern of sound teaching that we are to keep and to guard 2nd Timothy 1 verses 13 and 14 it's the test that's given to us to know who really knows God 1st John 4 verse 6 as John himself the apostle so poignantly said it in his second letter 2nd John verse 9 and 10 he said anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God whoever continues in the teaching has both the father and the son if anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching do not take them into your house or welcome them so unity with other

[28 : 58] Christians outside our own church it has to start right here with the word of God are they holding fast to the faithful word the gospel are they continuing in that teaching of Jesus and the apostles or are they leaving it behind or adding to it it's rather fitting that we come to this passage today as we have representatives here from the Baptist General Conference of Saskatchewan as most of you know by now we are exploring whether or not we can partner with them and have fellowship with them and the churches that they represent so that's what the meeting is all about we'll have some questions for them and I'm sure that they have questions for us but the most important question before we even get to most of those questions is whether we're both standing on this common ground and holding fast to the word of

God the faithful word the gospel that's been entrusted to us on that foundation the kind of unity that Jesus prayed for can flourish and grow between local churches fellowship can happen partnership and working together to reach the people of our province and beyond can happen so what we're doing today after the potluck is just one of those ways that we are seeking after this kind of unity that Jesus prayed for with other Christians outside our own church and we'll see what the Lord has for us with that let's take some time now to pray together and just talk to the Lord Lord about what we've heard Lord Jesus we open ourselves up before you and we invite you to examine us and to search our hearts Lord we bring these questions to you would you show us if there's any way that we have been hindering the unity of our own church here attitudes that we've brought things that we've said or done and if so we ask for your forgiveness and we ask that you would show us how we can make this right

Lord you know that there are some of those things that get such a deep hold in our lives whether anger bitterness hurtful habits I pray that you would deal with us that you would help us to overcome Lord I do pray that you would show us if there's anyone that we need to have a conversation with if there's anyone that we've been offended with or that we've offended show us Lord we desire that unity that you prayed for here in our church please work it and build it here among us make us a testimony to this community of Davidson around us we also pray as well for wisdom in our meeting later this afternoon we do want to be part of what you are doing in the larger scale of things here in

Saskatchewan around the world so give us wisdom about those things as well we just commit ourselves to you and to your grace in Jesus name amen