

Jesus prays for believers to come

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[0 : 00] All right, good morning. Okay, we're completing our mini-series on Jesus' high priestly prayer of John chapter 17.

So if you've got a Bible, whether it be an app or a real hard copy, please turn open to John chapter 17. As I said, it's the finish of the series, so it's the last six verses, verses 20 to 26.

Up to this point, as we've been going through the series, we've found that Jesus has been praying from the perspective of the big picture. He prays, glorify me at the very beginning.

He asked God to glorify him, and as we discovered in that, what he was really praying for was that God would actually glorify him at the cross. That was where his glory would be most evident to us. The hour for which he had come was that hour.

So he prays, glorify me. And then with his disciples present, he turns his prayer to them, and he prays for his disciples, sanctify them. He asks the Father to sanctify his disciples, to set them apart from the world, but within the world, and to actually go out into the world.

[1 : 14] And as they do that, he asks that the Father will keep them. The implication is that this is his will, and that this will have an impact.

As these people go out into the world, something will happen as a result. And now Jesus gets personal, and I say personal for a couple of reasons, but one of them is that he's actually talking about me and you, and the other is that he's actually becoming much more personal in his language, in the way that he's engaging with who he's praying for.

And he gets personal in a revolutionary way, because here he prays, not me, them, but us.

Unify us. He asks the Father to unify us. And by us, I don't just mean us here present. I mean all of us, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and us.

Not just Christian with Christian, but Christian with Christian, with Father, with Son, with Holy Spirit. So as we consider this, it's an amazing thing, the degree of personality that Jesus goes to at this point.

[2 : 37] Let's just think about how that's actually panned out in our society this week. Bo's already talked about Tower of Babel, which was several thousand years ago.

Just think about this week. How good are we at actually promoting unity within our society, within our families? Even our families, my goodness.

Within our church. How good are we at doing that? I think it's quite an interesting thing that we actually, the more we desire unity, the more we seem to be able to define how different we are.

And yet it's so difficult and so elusive it is for us to actually discover the reality of that unity, actually live in unity. Have you noticed that? There's this theory called intersectionalism, which is a really interesting theory.

It's a kind of a, I guess you call it neo-Marxist theory, that actually really is helpful at getting a sense of where we're different, where divisions occur, and the power imbalance that actually creates those divisions and sustains them.

[3 : 48] But one of the really interesting things I've been finding as I've been reading it is that even as we get better at understanding our lack of unity, our lack of unity, we still struggle to move from that point to actually producing unity.

We just don't seem to be able to do it. And it takes one virus for it to be every man for himself in the toilet paper aisle. Have you noticed that?

One thing. And boom, we suddenly break down into our constituent parts, don't we? So easily and so readily.

So perhaps we should get some sort of sense into how we actually find unity by just looking at what Jesus even does, which is to actually pray to the Father for unity.

He doesn't turn into himself or turn to an interesting or new philosophy. He turns to a person and he asks for it. Let's follow the passage through and see how that unfolds.

[4 : 54] See, Jesus prays at the beginning. We get a sense of who he's praying for in verse 20. He actually says that he's praying for those who will believe. I'll read that verse out, verse 20.

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word. Jesus has just prayed for his disciples that he's sending out.

Remember, I've just said that. And he absolutely expects there to be a response. And so he prays for those who he knows will believe in him. This belief will come through their word.

Their word is their testimony about Jesus' life and teaching. But remember, they're not very quick to understand what Jesus is talking about. It's been coming all the way through this whole upper room, this meal, this last meal together.

These guys, they don't seem to be like the sharpest tool in the shed at this point. On their own, they didn't understand. This testimony that they've passed down is based on the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

[5 : 56] And you can read about that in John 15, 26 to 27. It's something Jesus said at this meal table. Through the Spirit, they would remember what Jesus said. They would understand what Jesus did.

And we are those who have heard and believed their testimony. Those whom the Father chose, sanctified by the Father through those who believed before us, as Gareth taught with the kids about.

This message has been passed down and handed down. So as Jesus lifts his hands to heaven and prays, he prays for us.

For you. He knew even then that it would be you sitting here today. Think about that.

I mean, when we pray alone or as a family or as a small group, in our small groups, we're praying for the people around us that we love, aren't we?

[7 : 00] We know their needs. And we pray for them personally. In the words of this gospel that John's recorded, Jesus is praying personally for us.

Imagine yourself huddled around in that group and hearing these words. So what does Jesus pray for?

In a word? Unity. That we will be one like God. That's one aspect of it.

And the second aspect of this unity is that we will be together. So let's have a look at that as it unfolds in the passage. That's roughly the passage splits into two halves like that.

One like God and together. So in verse 21, we look at the oneness aspect. Jesus prays this. He prays that they might all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you.

[8 : 02] That they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. Can you see some of the nuances of oneness that are actually coming out here?

The first one is one like God. Jesus prays that we will be one. One like the Father and the Son are one.

I've got to say at this point, we're diving into a mystery that's so profound it may be confusing. I mean, I get some of these things done already. Last week we've looked at election and predestination. This week I'm actually getting the chance to dive into the mystery that is the Trinity. One God, three persons. What the heck does that mean? Well, I've got to say that in a sense we don't fully get it and we'll need eternity to contemplate it.

We get eternity to contemplate it, which is great. But Jesus is saying here that we'll also experience something of it here and now. We are becoming and will be one with each other like the Father and the Son are one.

[9 : 13] No less than that as our template. One like God. That's an amazing thing. Now, let me try and say something that's at least a start at grasping what Jesus is meaning here.

You see, the Father and the Son, if I was to describe them, the Father and the Son are distinguishable and inseparable. Distinguishable and inseparable. Distinguishable persons in the sense that we can see their distinctiveness, how they interact with each other and in the world. Their mutual glorifying of each other, self-giving love. They're distinguishable and they're inseparably one.

So one that it is impossible to pull them apart. I think perhaps at this point we're meant to think of the marriage oneness that we read about in Genesis 2, verse 24.

If you remember that, the man will leave his father and mother and the two will become one flesh. I think we're meant to kind of think of that sort of thing, that distinctiveness of the marriage relationship, serving one another, and our relationship in Christ inseparably joining us together. [10:34] Now, you know, I've preached a few times here now, and you know that occasionally I mention Joe, and perhaps some of you think I can't stop talking about her. But one of the things about marriage is this, that when you are actually one with someone, they are a huge part of your life.

You don't just step into a different place and feel like you're apart from them. There is an intimacy that you share in that relationship that you carry with you wherever you go.

Well, I want to say to you this, that oneness is something that marrieds experience in part, but that married or single, we experience in its fullness in Christ.

If you are single, you are not missing out on this promise. You get the real thing. Marriage is like the sermon illustration that I so often use.

The oneness that's being talked about here in Christ is the real thing. And it's something that we're expected to express as a community, a church community. One like God.

[11:47] The next point he goes on to make, which he really focuses on, it comes up in verse 21, but he really focuses on in verse 22, is that we're also one with God. Let me read verse 22 out.

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.

It's the second time he speaks about being one. Verse 21, verse 22, and verse 23, he repeats this desire for us to be one.

So when we read these verses, what we discover is that we're saved to be one like God, and we're saved to be one with God. The glory that Jesus shares with us is his completed work at the cross. We discover that in the first week of this series. So three weeks ago, two weeks ago. And remember that Jesus' prayer for himself was, glorify me.

[12:48] And here he's saying that we will share in that glory. In other words, we will experience the fruit of his saving work. In Christ, we are one with God.

We are united so deeply and profoundly through Jesus at the cross that we are not just like the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Not just one like them, but one with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Distinguishable, dare I say, distinguishable and inseparable from God. Not God, but distinguishable and inseparable from him.

And this is another truth that I can only imagine in terms of from lesser to greater. So to think of the relationships that I share with my friends and family, and to think beyond that, to realize that that is just a pale shadow of what Jesus is talking about here in terms of our relationship with God.

Jesus' prayer is that we might experience this truth in our lives together. It's an amazing thing.

[14:10] Finally, so we've had one like God, one with God, and the final point he makes is that we are one for God. A lot hangs on this.

Jesus reveals in his prayer that our unity reveals his nature. He says in verse 23, 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 loved me.

This unity is meant to be visible, not in our statement of beliefs, but in our actions, our lives together.

Not in isolation, but actually in the world. Our unity is meant to be so clear and distinct that the world knows that Jesus was sent from the Father.

It's important to God that the Son is vindicated before the world. And there will come a time when every knee will bow before Jesus, but we are the first place that this starts to happen.

[15:13] The world will see Jesus' glory through our unity. unity. This is the role that God has given us in the world. Our unity was meant to be so clear and distinct that the world knows that Jesus was sent from the Father and that we are loved by the Father.

It's also the way God shows his love for us. Unity like this is supernatural. We can't do it ourselves. We divide and divide and divide again until we're comfortable with the people around us, or lonely, or a mixture of both. The unity that God is working in us is astoundingly different.

It's not of this world. And I don't use these phrases to undermine the believability of what I'm saying. I use them because that's what people think when they see it lived out.

The unity of God expressed by us and with him is astounding. We were talking to some friends recently and they were talking about how they're moving from one place to another and how difficult it is for them to settle in.

[16:32] They're not Christians. How hard it is to break into a new community. Have you thought about what it's like when you travel from one place to another as a Christian and you go into a church community?

Yeah, they're a bunch of strangers. You don't really know them. But in some sense, you really do know them as well. And you feel so at home and comfortable in their presence. Friends, Jesus' prayer is that we might experience this truth in our lives together day by day.

But can I ask you this? Is it our desire? Is it our prayer? Is it our goal? Jesus gets personal and this is the one thing he emphasizes.

Is it the thing that we yearn for? I'm going to suggest that even if it is, we don't conform to it. Now, if you're a visitor here and you're starting to wonder what's going on here, what kind of church have I come into?

Please understand we're a bunch of people who are not perfect. We're not the finished work. Jesus is praying here that this might be perfected in us. So please allow that we're a work in progress and the reality that there are problems within this church family that we need to deal with.

[17:46] Who do you feel awkward around? So this I'm speaking to the members of the congregation here now. Who do you feel awkward around? Who do you avoid? Who are you holding a grudge against?

Who is holding a grudge against you that you know about? Why have we allowed separation within the inseparable?

Perhaps you're thinking, well, if only you knew what they did to me, then you'd understand. Let me say this. And I say this knowing the challenges of broken relationships.

Whatever they did to you was an offense against God first. And God the Son died to deal with it. Surely we should be prepared to do the same.

Surely this is what Jesus is calling us to do. I'm going to encourage you now, right now, to make a list. Write down the names or put them in your phone or mentally log them.

[19:00] The names of the people you need to reconcile to. Log that list of names. Resolve to deal with that list starting today.

begin where Jesus began by praying that unity would reign despite the existence of that list.

And if anyone on that list is too big for you to contemplate dealing with, then seek help. Talk to someone. Talk to a friend. Talk to your small group leader.

To an elder. The thought of even this may terrify you. And perhaps you're in a place where you really can't even think about approaching someone.

You really struggle to engage with someone in a conflict type scenario. I'm going to say something to you that I think is wisdom. And I hope, I'm not trying to offend you if you struggle with the issue of psychology.

[20:04] But I'm going to say this. If the thought of actually engaging with someone where a relationship is broken down and it's a brother or sister in Christ, then I would say to you, seek professional help so that you can fulfill Jesus' desire and prayer for us that we might be unified.

Whatever it takes to realize the unity that Jesus died to save us for. For us to be distinguishable and inseparable.

To be devoted to joyfully giving ourselves to one another. What a wonderful thing it is that Jesus is praying for here.

Let this, if anything, be our battle cry. So Jesus prays for oneness.

And then he goes on to pray that that oneness might be experienced together in proximity.

[21:13] All along, Jesus has been praying from the perspective of the big picture and you can see how he keeps breaking into how he's, to shape his prayer. But have you noticed already how personal this last section is?

Oneness. And now, this prayer is about us all being together. He says in verse 24, 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 loved me before the foundation of the world.

Can you see how we're just being swept up personally in an eternal, abrasive, eternal perspective? Jesus prays for the elect, the ones the Father has given him and his heart's desire is that we be

together with him.

Notice that. He's praying about us like we're his close personal family. All this father and son language are now drawing us in as well to share in it.

You know, even when we say our farewells, so for example, yesterday was Joe's birthday and so our daughter came up from Sydney and all the kids came over and we had a meal together and even as we're leaving at the end of that day, even as we're leaving after all the photos are done and Facebook posts have happened, all that sort of stuff, even as they're leaving, we're already, if you notice, how you're already thinking about the next time you'll get together.

[22 : 51] Have you noticed that? As we dropped Hannah off at the train station on the way to the church this morning, we were talking with her about the next time we would see her. It's a natural thing for us to do, isn't it?

We love each other. We want to be in each other's presence. This is the kind of imagery that Jesus is invoking here. These people I am praying for are my close, close personal family.

He's praying with an eye on the time when he knows that he'll be together again with us.

And this prayer isn't just for his own personal desire. It's the same desire the Father has. So Jesus prays in line with the Father's will.

The Father chose us and sent the Son to save us and plan for us all to be together since before the foundation of the world. This isn't plan B for a botched plan A.

[23 : 55] This isn't a passing feeling that God has. Friends for now, but you know, one of these ones that I'm going to kind of limit the amount of posts I see from them.

This relationship is eternal in scope. And it's headed toward a place where Jesus' glory is unveiled. And glory unveiled in the sense of to be basked in rather than feared, to be delighted in, to be shared.

But there's a pathway that Jesus must walk first because the Father is righteous or just. Same word in Greek. Jesus prays in verse 25.

O righteous or just, 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.

Verses 25 and 26. Jesus prays, Holy Father, when he prays for his disciples to be sanctified in the last section. Now he prays righteous or just, Father, because justice is the focus of what's about to come.

[25 : 17] Do you remember when Moses got a glimpse of God's glory? Two weeks ago we looked at this. When Moses got a glimpse of God's glory, as God passed, as we looked at Exodus chapter 34 verses 6 and 7, if you want to look it back up, Moses asked to get a glimpse or get to see God's glory and Moses got a glimpse of God's glory.

As God passed by Moses, he only showed him a glimpse. That's all Moses could cope with and live. And as he passed Moses, he declared his nature in these words. This is Exodus 34, 6 and 7. This is God declaring of himself, the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation.

The experience of God's people right up to Jesus. God is absolutely just. No sin goes unpaid for. Either it's paid for at the cross or you carry it yourself. The cross is where God's love and justice meet. So at the cross, Jesus has made God known to us in his fullness.

[26 : 47] Not simply in being present in human form or in his teaching about God or his example of how to live, all those things are all important, but in his dying for us. This is the love that Jesus is talking about in John 13, 34.

So this is earlier in his conversation with his disciples over this meal. In verse 34, he says this, A new commandment I give you that you love one another.

Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

Jesus' love turns away God's righteous judgment. It opens the way into God's unfiltered presence. It enables us to see his glory and live, to know that that point of family reunification is coming and to not fear it but to delight in it, to long for it.

[27 : 47] If we understand the cross as God intended to, then we will see what's about to come in the Gospel of John as love, an expression of love.

If we believe in him, then this cross-shaped love applies to us. It's our experience of what Jesus is praying about here. just as I have loved you, Jesus says.

The cross, the moment Jesus is glorified, the moment we know how loved we are, the moment we are loved beyond measure, personally.

When you think of Jesus' desire is to be with us, that moment in history at the cross is like those family reunions, the fierceness of God's embrace, the breath against our neck as he envelops us, the warmth of God's greeting, the intimacy of bonds that go beyond words.

This is the imagery that's being used here of what he's about to do at the cross. This is the eternal desire of God for us, for love and justice to meet, but not in our bodies.

[29 : 23] Thank God. And this love is made possible through the cross. Love where justice is turned away from us is made possible at the cross.

So friends, we never move from the cross. We never move on from it. This isn't like basic teachings and then you become more mature as a Christian and you start to understand some of the bigger words. We never move on from this.

It remains forever the foundation of our unity with God and with each other, our pattern for relating to God and to each other, our personal experience of the Father's love for us, our way of loving the world together.

This is what our friends and family who aren't yet Christians should see modeled in us, a cross-shaped love. Not just see modeled in us though, but they should experience it when they're included in our social gatherings, when we celebrate as we often do.

We should be celebrating alongside our friends who are still of the world. Anyone who socializes with us, whether that be members of the LGBTI community or the homeless or anyone else, should feel welcome in our midst, in our gatherings.

[30 : 39] They should feel safe. They should feel loved with this distinctive kind of love. This is the community that God is calling us to be, a community that just shows just how wonderfully God has loved us.

It doesn't just show it, but actually enables people who don't yet know Jesus as their Savior to experience it personally through us and to see their way toward believing in Jesus too.

So in conclusion then, Jesus prays that the Father will glorify him and he does at the cross.

Jesus prays that the Father will sanctify his disciples and through them all who follow and he does by the cross. And Jesus prays that the Father will unify us all and he is doing as a community of people who experience his love daily through the cross.

Let me pray. Father God, we are so good at building our own kingdoms, our own designs around our lives, even our own desires around your church here.

[32 : 13] We very quickly come up with ideas of what this church family should look like. But I pray, Father, through looking at the Son's prayer, that Son's prayer over us, that we might have a bit more of a sense of what you desire for us and that you might stir in our hearts a desire for the same.

And as that desire is stirred, Lord, that you would grow in us this sense of awe at the glory that you've shown of yourself at the cross. The sense of unity that we have through your Son with you through the cross and that it might colour and shape everything we try to build in your name.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.