

John 17:20-26

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[0:00] Good morning. This is an important Sunday in the calendar year of the church.

! It's the first Sunday after Ascension.! It doesn't take enough time to sort of think and meditate and think of the importance of the fact that Jesus ascended bodily into heaven.

And what that means for us is Ascension was his enthronement. He goes back into heaven as a conquering king, having destroyed sin and death.

He enters and approaches, if you think of Daniel's vision in the Old Testament, as the one who approaches the throne of God in the heavenlies. It's described as one who comes in victory, in all power and majesty.

That's what the Ascension is. And Jesus, in this upper room discourse that we've been going through, has alluded to it multiple times. That he will die.

[1:21] Yes, he alluded to that. And he will rise again on the third day. But not only that, that he will go back. And the promise of his going back is that he will then send another helper for us, isn't it?

We have the Holy Spirit. We'll talk more about that next week as we remember Pentecost. But the Ascension is important because you think that, we often think that maybe Christ's work, it is finished.

He said it himself. It is worth of rescuing us, atoning for our sins. It is finished. But that doesn't mean that our Lord has stopped working on our behalf.

We ought not to think that. He is there, standing at the right side of the Father, enthroned in heaven, interceding, the Bible says, for us.

He is our advocate. That's a comforting thing to think of. And I think it's actually important to see that as we enter into chapter 17 of John this morning.

[2:28] This is Jesus' high-priestly prayer. It's often referred to as that. And this prayer is specifically about him praying for our unity and love within the church.

He prays for himself in verse 1 to 5 of chapter 17. And then in verse 6 to 19, he prays for his disciples. And in the passages that we're going to be really going into, through this morning, verse 20 to 26, he now prays for you.

He prays for me. He prays for the church. Isn't that comforting to know that Jesus, even before he goes to the cross, is praying for you.

And he's praying for me. And it's also, mind this fact, that he's also still advocating. He hasn't ceased.

He advocates for you day and night. There's no better advocate. So let's look.

[3:35] I encourage you to open your Bibles to John 17. If you want to grab your pew Bible, it's on page 1074 of your pew Bible. You will need to open there if you can as we go along through this.

But before we do that, let us pray. Lord God, we thank you for your ascension into heaven. Thank you, Lord, that having finished your work, accomplishing the work of atoning for our sins, perfectly obeying the law, and then being vindicated and rising up on the third day.

Thank you, Lord, that you ascended in victory. And because you ascended, we have new life. We have communion with the triune God, with the Father and the Son, with the Spirit.

Thank you, Lord, for that, Lord. And thank you, Lord, that you, your Spirit lives in us. And God the Son intercedes for us. And God the Father loves us.

And because of this, we have hope and we have peace and we have joy. Remind us this morning as we enter into your word of all of these things that you've given us. And encourage our hearts, Lord, to cling to you even more, our great Savior.

[4:50] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So, you know, we talk about unity a lot. Everybody talks about unity a lot.

Not only in the church, but even outside the church. But especially within the church, we talk often about unity. And oftentimes, I think, we think of it in terms of institutional unity, right?

We have different denominations. And I feel if we look in this prayer, you might be concerned to think, well, Jesus prays for unity.

It doesn't seem, if you look around, that the church is unified. It doesn't. What is unity, then, within the church?

What does it look like? We ought to look at this verse and what Jesus says unity looks like. And we ought to then, after seeing what Jesus said unity looks like, be careful not to strive for unity in the way the world strives for unity.

[5:56] Unity within the church is not institutional unity, like the world's unity, right? Think of the institutions of the world that boast of unity.

The UN, for example. How effective are they? Yeah. Let's even think of, even within nations, institutional unity always breaks down.

It is not effective. It is a farce sometimes, almost. That's not what the church, the unity that Jesus is referring to here is. It's not institutional unity that is, that the world often tries to erect and always fails.

And I mean, when I say the world's attempt to unity always fails, I mean always fails. There can be no true lasting unity without God. Just as there can be no lasting peace.

Think of Babel. That's probably the most unified human beings I've ever been at the Tower of Babel. Here we're a unified group with one purpose, trying to do one thing.

[7:03] And the Bible says they were effective and they were doing it. But God put a stop to it. And you might think, often times we read that we think, oh God was threatened by them. That's why he put a stop to it.

No, God in his mercy put a stop to it. Because they would, whatever it is that they were doing, they were doomed. It was a doomed attempt.

And God in his mercy put a stop to it. And you'll have to wait until next week as we talk about the effects of that in Pentecost. We'll have more of that. But this is the fact.

There is no true unity in the world. And not a lasting one anyway. There's always peace and rumors of peace. But war always raises its head.

Eventually. But Jesus here prays in these verses. Especially in verse 20 to 26. He prays that we, his people, those that will believe in the future.

[8:02] Not only just the apostles now, but even those that will believe in the future. The church of Christ will be unified. But where does this unity come from? The unity of the church is an organic unity.

It's a natural unity. It might be helpful for us to think of it as a familiar unity. When you're in the family. And the family is not even a perfect example of the unity.

But it approximates a little bit what it might look like. The family is unified. You have different people, different personalities. It's your family. You know?

It's just natural. And even though because of sin and all of those things, that often even breaks down. But maybe that's the best way we can. It's this unity that Jesus talks about is an organic, natural unity.

That Christ himself initiated and accomplished. And what's the basis of this unity? It is a unity of spirit and of truth.

[9:02] It is a unity based on the person and work of Jesus Christ. It's not just a unity of love. But it's a unity that is based and relies on an acceptance and obedience of God's word.

That as it is received from the apostles. The starting point of this Christian unity is faith in Jesus Christ.

Do you hear me? Faith in Jesus Christ is the starting point. But it's the faith in the Jesus that's faithfully proclaimed. A Jesus that is faithfully proclaimed according to the apostles' teaching.

That is the ground of our unity in the church. That is what Jesus prays for. That is why in verse 20, Jesus prays for us.

Those who believe in their word, Jesus says. In whose word? In the apostles' word. In the apostles' teaching. Those are the people Jesus is praying for unity concerning.

[10:12] Those who come to believe in their apostles' word. And come to believe in Jesus Christ. So any call. Hear me brothers and sisters. Any call to set aside God's truth.

As it is revealed in the Bible. In order to achieve unity. Is not unity at all. Do you see it? If anyone is saying. Well let's get unified.

But forget about what Jesus says in John 3. And what he says in John 5. And what he says in John 8. Forget about Paul. Paul is not Jesus. All of those things.

Anyone that seeks to do violence. With God's word. They're pulling apart the fabrics of unity. And there is no grounds for unity there.

The grounds for unity. Is faith in Jesus Christ. Based on the apostolic word. Christian unity. Is cannot be separated from loyalty to God's word.

[11:11] In fact Jesus warns us. As did his apostles. To be wary. To be careful. To beware of those who will demand unity.

While departing from the truth of his word. We know such people don't we? Those who claim the name of Jesus. But are forsaking God's word. Instead their loyalty.

Has come to lie. With the changing winds of the world. Such people. The Bible tells us. Are a cancer. To the body.

We are to depart from them. We are not to associate with them. There can be no unity. Without faithful commitment. To God's word.

As it is revealed in the Bible. That is the ground. Of our unity. We have experienced what that means. To depart from them.

[12:11] As Anglicans. Haven't we? We have experienced the cost. Of what it means to depart from them. But. It was the necessary step. Another. To maintain unity.

This is why we can have unity. With our Baptist. Presbyterian. Or Lutheran friends. Although we may disagree. On some distinctives. About ecclesiology.

Or baptism. Or one of those other things. But we can have unity. With them. And this is why we cannot have unity. With the Episcopal Church. We have more in common.

We can say. Denominationally. With the Episcopal Church. Than we do with the Baptists. Across the street. Or the Presbyterians. Across the road. But. Because.

They have departed. From the word of God. We cannot have no unity with them. This is what Jesus is saying here. Unity is tied. To fidelity. To his word.

[13:09] It cannot be separated. Our unity is based. Not on political affiliations. Or denominational ties. Or any other man-made things.

It's. This is always a tendency. To think that. Our unity is based on. Human man-made affiliations. It is not. It is based solely. On faith in Jesus.

Revealed. In the Apostolic Word. I seem to be liberating the point. But this is important for us to understand. As we. As we understand. What Jesus is praying for here.

And why it is significant. And Jesus goes on in verse 22. And he prays that the glory. Which the Father has given him. Might be transmitted. To us. This is a wonderful prayer.

What is this glory that Jesus speaks of? Oftentimes in the Bible. Glory is. Commonly means. The manifestation. Of God's person. That's what the glory is.

[14:06] The manifestation of God's person. And God's purpose. By his divine act. And proclamation. So for example. God's glory was manifested. At Sinai.

God's glory was manifested. At the crossing of the Red Sea. His divine act. Was manifested. His glory was manifested. God's glory was manifested.

In the saving of Israel. From Egypt. God's glory is manifested. As we've been talking about. At the cross. The world doesn't often.

Understand or identify. Or see God's glory. But that. God's glory. Is the manifestation. Of his. Power. But also. Of his purpose. And.

Of his person. This glory. Has been revealed. To. His first followers. Jesus' first followers. The apostles. Those. Those.

[15:02] Are his authoritative. Eyewitnesses. And through. Their spirit. Inspired witness. We have the word of God. And it has been made known to us.

So Jesus is referring. To this glory. As he anticipates. What he's about to do. He's anticipating. His death on the cross. His resurrection. From the grave.

And his exaltation. And enthronement. At his ascension. He anticipates all this. As he. As he says. God. As he prays. That God will give them.

The glory. That he has. The glory that he has. With the father. Will be transmitted. To us. Now. How does that lead.

All of that. Lead to the church. Being one. As Jesus. Praise for. All these things. That Jesus refers to. In terms of his glory.

[15 : 56] And his oneness. With the father. The father. All this. Jesus himself. Has done. And accomplished. He's done it. So that we may be one.

As he and the father. Are one. Can you see. The comparison. That Jesus makes there. It should bring us. To our knee. In praise. And glory.

Of God. He says. That they may be one. That's us. Within this body. As he and the father. Are one. That's the model. Of our unity.

Unity. The unity. Between the triune. God. Is the model. For our unity. And you might be. At this point. It's like. Well. Yeah. That's.

That's impossible. I don't see it. But that is the model. For our unity. Let that sink in. Just a bit. Jesus's prayer.

[16 : 47] For our unity. Is rooted. In the very nature. Of God himself. Twice. Jesus refers. To the perfect. Oneness. Between the Godhead. In verse 21.

Jesus says. Just as you. Father. Are in me. And I in you. That they also. May be in us. And then in verse 20. The end of verse 22.

To the beginning of verse 23. Jesus says. That they may be one. Even as we are one. I in them. And you in me. That they may become.

Perfectly one. So this is. Just as there is. Unity in diversity. In the Trinity. Do you know that. The triune God. Has diversity.

We say. We believe in one God. In three persons. That is. That is the definition. Of unity. In diversity. And just. And just there.

[17 : 43] As there is unity. Among the tri. The Godhead. The Trinity. Between the Father. The Son. And the Holy Spirit. Jesus prays. That we also. Will reflect. The same unity.

In our diversity. Diversity is. It's a good thing. Within the body of Christ. We are not striving. For uniformity. God is not.

Uniform. We have. We believe in one God. In three persons. Diversity. Is a God honoring. And God glorifying thing. But even within. That diversity. God is praying here.

Jesus praying. That we will be unified. We see the diversity. Among us. I think of. Without. The cross of Jesus Christ.

Without his great salvation. Where will all of us be? An away. An away.

[18 : 46] Military. Apologies. Brad. You've said it before. A man from. From the north country.

People from the midwest. A Nigerian. I think of even. My own family. A Norwegian. Without the cross of Christ.

There is no grounds. For this. Here. Right now. Nepalese. Bhutanese people. People from the south.

Florida. Married to a Californian. Without the cross of Christ. There is no grounds. Differences of occupation.

And socioeconomic backgrounds. And family make-ups. People that have come out of. Of great deliverance.

[19 : 45] From a life of being battered by sin. And those who have just told the line. Church people all their life. What is the ground. For all of us.

To come together. And love one another. And be unified. Without the cross of Christ. There is no unity. And we're going to get to that. That is the purpose. For which Christ is praying for.

Because the world sees it. This. That is before you. Brothers and sisters. Cannot be replicated. In the world. The world. As I said before.

Tries. But it can't sustain it. And not just here. Among us. Think about diocese. If you've gone to synod. You see Nigerians.

And Texans. And you know. New York people. And people from all over the country. Think of the church worldwide.

[20 : 38] Why? If you go into any church. That believes. And clings to God's word. You're among family members. Without the cross of Christ.

There is. Without Jesus. There's no ground for that unity. So this is what. This is the unity. That God's. And there is still diversity. In all of those things. That I've said. But. Unity. Is established. Because of Jesus Christ. This is. What. Jesus prays for. This is. As the father. This is the. This is what.

We have. In Christ. As the father. Sends. The son goes. And the spirit. Applies. The salvation. To us. We have. That unity.

Because of the triune God. God. And as we await. The completion of it. Because as we see. And. I hope there's a bit of unease. Even as I've been saying all of this.

[21 : 35] Because she's like. Well. You know. We're not there yet. There's. There's work to be done. There is. There is still. Tension. Even here. In the church of God. Concerning that unity.

And that is true. But we await. The promise of God's. Finally. Completion of it. That's the prayer of our Lord. That's the comfort. That we have. That is what encourages us.

That by union with Christ. We have communion. With the Father. And the Holy Spirit. This union. That we have with God. Is a union of life.

Life. Giving. Abundant. Life. That is the basis. Of our unity. So. We are positionally.

United. What I mean by that is that. Christ has already placed us. Within his family. By what he has done. We are united with Christ. And we have unity with God. And with one another.

[22 : 32] But Jesus prays. That our unity. Our oneness. May be perfected. See in verse 23. In this. Jesus prays for us. Jesus prays.

That the Holy. That through the Holy Spirit. We may maintain. The unity. He is created. It. Note that. He has created it.

But he prays. That we may maintain it. By the. In the power of the Holy Spirit. By the ongoing work. Of the Holy Spirit. In us. And among us. I'm reminded. As I think. As I said that.

Of our. Of our sermon series. Through Ephesians. Specifically Ephesians. Chapter 4. When Paul. Admonishes the Ephesians. To make every effort. To keep the unity of the Spirit.

Through the bond of peace. That's what. Is going on here. That's also what Jesus is praying for. The Holy Spirit. Is given to the church. To enable us.

[23 : 28] To walk. In this unity. We have the means. To walk in this unity. In the power of the Holy Spirit. When the body of Christ. Christ. And each member.

Within the body. Is led. By the Spirit. We are brought. More intimately. Into communion. With God. Our love.

For one another. Will flow. From the Father's love. For the Son. That is a love.

That knows no end. That is a love. That will not die. That is the life. That given love. On which. The Christian. Rests.

It is the basis. Of our comfort. And assurance. Even in this broken. And evil world. And that's the first purpose. Don't you see. Of this unity.

[24 : 21] As God prays for it. It's that we may come. You and I. May come. To enjoy God. That we may enjoy. His glory. And the Father's love.

For the Son. Will become. Our love. As well. That we will. Come. To act. Relationship. With God. The Father.

God the Son. And God the Holy Spirit. That is the first purpose. Of this unity. That we ourselves. Will be transformed. By this unity. As it is increasingly. Made known to us.

By the continuing work. Of the Holy Spirit. And it is expressed. In our love. For one another. Now imagine. What unity. Expressing itself.

Through love. Might look like. Among us. There will be. A closeness. And a bond. That is a reflection. Of the bond.

[25 : 18] Of love. Between the Father. The Son. And the Holy Spirit. There will be. A healthy. Mutual dependency. And acknowledgement. That we. Are indeed.

The body of Christ. And each member. Is a part of the other. There is no useless member. Within the body. And there is no. Self-sufficient.

Independent. Member. We are mutually dependent. On one another. Now. That is the first. Purpose of this unity. The second purpose. Of the unity. Is that the world.

Might see. And be drawn in. That they might come. To know Jesus. That they might know. Come to know. That he is the revelation.

Of God. And that they might come. Themselves. To share. In the love. By coming to faith. In Jesus Christ. That's always God's plan.

[26:12] We were talking about it. Downstairs. In our. In our. Sunday school. About the. The God's. Plan. For Israel. Is covenant people. Is that by their. Faithfulness. By their fidelity.

And to his word. And their. Love for one another. And the way. They love the poor. Among them. And the. And the. Strangers among them. They might show.

To the nations around them. The love of God. That's. The same here. God hasn't changed. It is always. As planned. That his people. Will so. Resemble.

Him. That the world. Will see. And take note. And the world. Will come. Looking. For Jesus.

Because. Of the way. In which. We love one another.

Now. It's. It's here. It's easy here. It's easy here. To buy into the falsehood. That says. Preach the gospel. At all times. But if necessary.

[27:08] Use words. That's not what Jesus. Is saying here. And I. I think by the way. People say. St. Francis of Assisi said that. He didn't. That's wrongly. Attributed to him. I don't know.

We made it up. But it's not. It's not St. Francis of Assisi said it. That's not what Jesus. Is saying here. It's not saying. Just love people. But you don't have to proclaim. The gospel. That's not what is going.

Our proclamation. We know that our proclamation. Of the gospel. Of Jesus Christ. Is important. And is essential. We have to proclaim. Jesus. Romans 10. 17.

Tells us that. Tells us that. Faith in Jesus. Comes. From what is heard. And what is heard. Comes through the message. Which is the proclamation. About Christ.

But. What Jesus is pointing to here. Is that our proclamation. Of the gospel. Must be matched. By our conviction. The world needs to see.

[28:06] That what we proclaim. Is what we believe. And how we relate. To one another. Within the church. Shows that. What we proclaim. Is what we believe.

The gospel message. Is made credible. To the world around us. When. When they see. That it agrees. With the quality. Of our relationships. With each other.

If we are full. In the church of God. Now. If we are full of. Fashionism. If we are full of. Pride. And arrogance. Bitterness.

Lack of gentleness. And humility. If that is what marks us. Then we are walking. Contradictions. Of the gospel. Of Jesus Christ.

And in. If that's what marks us. We are repelling the world. From the message. Of the gospel. May it never be so. Among us. But.

[29:05] If our lives. Conforms. To the gospel. If we love one another. As Jesus prays here. It will make the world.

Take notice. And in turn. They will glorify Jesus. And that. This is. This doesn't mean. That we are without fault. In the church.

This doesn't mean. That we're not going to. Sin against one another. This doesn't mean. That this assembly. Is an assembly. Of perfect. Already glorified people. We know.

That that is all impossible. On this side of glory. But it does mean. That even when. We fall short. And sin against one another. And hurt one another.

We are quick. To forgive. We are gracious. To one another. We lift each other up. We seek restitution.

[29:59] And reconciliation. If there is broken relationships. Among us. That is not. What the world does. And when we do that. We are living.

In conformity. To the proclamation. Of the gospel. That we proclaim. When we don't hold. A brother's sin. Against him. But we are quick. To forgive.

When we don't. Build walls. To keep people out. Within the body of Christ. I want you to note. How all of what I've described.

Is the opposite. Of how the world operates. Especially. Currently. In the world. That we live in. In the climate. In the culture. That we live in. We live in a vindictive culture.

A culture. That requires. It's kind of. A flesh. If anyone were to. To. To fail. Even if it's like. You know. 30 years ago. That failure came.

[31:01] You know. When they were like. 10 years old. The world requires them to. That's the. That is not. The church of Christ. Christ. So.

How might we shine. How might we shine. With a glorious light. Of the gospel of Jesus. In the person and work of Jesus. If we live the life of God.

If we live the love of God. And we live the unity of God. Among us. Can you imagine. How we will shine. In country distinction.

Against the darkness. Around us. The father's love. For his people. And his union with them.

Through Jesus. Leads.

To this unity. And this unity. Testifies to the world. The truth of the gospel. But the church. I'm not. I'm not talking about.

[31 : 57] About the. I'm not just talking about. Holy Trinity alone here. I'm thinking. I'm talking about. The church at large. We often reflect. The culture. Around us.

Rather than. The triune God. That we are called to reflect. And it might be helpful. To know. That to be. Of the world. When I say.

The world here. Doesn't mean. That we are. Ranked pagans. Or licentious people. Often times. We think of the world. As those people. Who are living in. Just. Just. Sold out to sin.

But think of the Pharisees. They were religious people. But Jesus says of them. Woe to you. You are like. Whitewashed tombs.

Which outwardly. Appears beautiful. Beautiful. But within. Are full of dead. People's bones. And all. All uncleanness. Worldliness.

[32 : 56] Doesn't have to look. Like. You know. Hollywood. Worldliness. Can be. Religious. Piety. False piety.

Being. Like. Whitewashed tombs. But inside. Full of all uncleanness. It's because. It's because. It's because.

Jesus saw the Pharisees. For who they really are. And. Oftentimes. Sometimes. We are. The world sees. Churches.

Who proclaim. To follow Jesus. Who have departed. From his word. They are. Whitewashed tombs. Full of dead people's bones.

That's. We do not want to look like that. Jesus still sees us. Brothers and sisters. He sees into our hearts.

[33 : 54] He knows. Us. So let us examine ourselves. To make sure our lives agree. With the gospel. Rather than contradict it. But. Jesus continues.

In his prayer. The last verses. Of 24 to 26. Is Jesus praying. That. We will be perfected. In him. Jesus' prayer.

In verse 24. Is that. What. That the glory. That we will come to see. Is glory. And what's that glory. That we're going to see. This is. Jesus praying.

For his. The perfection. Did you listen. When we read. Revelation. Revelation. What marks. The people of God. In Revelation. That is what Jesus.

Is praying for here. That we will come. To see his glory. Fully. That is the ultimate. End. To which Jesus. Is praying. That is the hope.

[34 : 49] And future. That we have. Ahead of us. Brothers and sisters. He is secured. Our salvation. And he's worthy. And able to keep it. Until that day. When we will see him.

In his full glory. Unveiled. The glory he had. Before. The foundation of the world. That is the end. To which Jesus prays. That is the end. To which we. Look. And we hope. This unity. That Jesus prays for.

Is observable. And so. I want us to see. That this. Prayer of Jesus. Is intimately tied. To the person. Of Jesus. And to the work.

Of Jesus. Without Jesus. We don't have it. Without. Fidelity to his word. We can't. Obtain it. Without union. With Jesus. We have no union.

[35 : 45] With the father. And with the Holy Spirit. But. Because we have. Union with Jesus. Which is based on. Obedience to his word. And fidelity to his word. We have.

Communion. With the father. The son. And the Holy Spirit. So the invitation. For us. Is to come. Jesus says it. In revelation. Come. Come.

He beckons. Come. And see the glory. Of Jesus Christ. And come. And know the father's love. Through me. That is the proclamation. Of the gospel.

That is our proclamation. To the world. In its darkness. Around us. And we must. Invite the world. To come. We cannot. Set up boundaries. We must let people.

Turn. To self-righteous. Pride. In all the forms. That comes in. Because self-righteous. Pride.
Creates. Distance.
Distance. And disunity. Within the body. We are all sinners. That have been saved. By grace. And
brought into the family. Of God. We have no legs. To stand on. We stand on the rock.
That is Christ. But it's also. The word of comfort. That we will know. That in Jesus. This is important.
For us to know. In Jesus. The father loves you. That is the point. Of Jesus' prayer. The father loves
you. As he loves Christ.

Of the father. And if you have the love. Of the father. What can the word offer. And how can the word hurt you. Yeah. The will. We have been talking about this.

The word hates. Jesus. And the word hates. The gospel. So. By inference. You should expect. That the world will. Hate you. But.

Have no fear. You have the love of God. And the peace of God. And communion with God. And you have. Looking forward.

[38 : 34] Of God's glory. That you will be with him. For eternity. That is our hope. And our comfort. And our assurance. Let us pray.

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