

United by the Father

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Preacher: Pastor Andrew

[0 : 00] Well, what do you say to that?

Wow. What an amazing opportunity it is to come into God's house, to worship with God's people,¹ and to lift up the person of Christ through the songs into the songs, to be encouraged and challenged through the ministry of the Word that is coming through in each of the songs that we sing.

Exalting Him, exalting God, and being challenged through the instrument of music to be drawn into affection for Jesus Christ.

Well, it's been several weeks that we have been away as a family. I think I remember Pastor Kenoyer talking about how full his heart was when he came from vacation.

And so, to be gone for three weeks and to be back with you, I guess I'm going to do a preemptive, please forgive me if I get a little excited this morning. So, I know I've been encouraged to dial it back a little bit, and so I'm going to try to do that.

[1 : 18] But if I don't, you'll understand that it's just the nature of encouragement of being with God's people and being back with you. What a joy.

Open with me, if you would, to John chapter 17, verses 20 to 26. I appreciate the fact that John read this already, so you have already a sense of the context.

You kind of know that the theme of the music this morning, and even the special music that was given to us today, thank you, Amy, what a blessing that was, all kind of come together and help to reinforce this message of the significance of the unity of the church.

United by the Father. That's what we're going to see this morning as we look into the Scripture. Over the past couple of weeks, we've been studying through this high priestly prayer.

This is going to be the third of three messages in this chapter. And although we're moving through this chapter in quick succession, I don't want you to misunderstand the significance of this high priestly prayer.

[2 : 29] Just because we're going through it in three segments does not mean that this is not a mountain peak in the Gospel of John. This is significant.

This is our Lord and Savior who is not only modeling prayer, but praying for the church and praying for His disciples. The real reason why we've chosen to do this in three segments is to help reinforce the themes that Jesus is praying for in this chapter.

So that we don't miss the themes that Jesus wants to reinforce by digging into the details. And as that is important, in this particular venue, we want to just emphasize the basic structures of this prayer and how they relate to us as believers.

As we looked at John chapter 17 verses 1 to 5, we saw that Jesus was exalting the glory of the Father. He has preeminently on His mind the significance of the glory of the Father.

So whether it be in offering salvation, or whether it be in coming to earth as a man, or whether it be following through in terms of obedience, or whether it be communicating the message of the Father through the words that He communicated, or whether it be the miracles that He performed in showing compassion to the multitudes, in every situation, in every case, Jesus had preeminently on His mind the significance of the glory of the Father.

[4 : 07] His heart's desire was to glorify Him. And in glorifying the Father, He knew that there would be residual and companion glory for Himself as He was faithful to uphold His Father's will.

In verses 6 to 19, we see that Jesus here is praying for His disciples. He understands that they've been given to Him by the Father. He has expressed an interest in teaching them throughout His ministry, and He's praying that that ministry of teaching would be reinforced.

He wants them to be kept and guarded by the Father and by the Son in the midst of a hostile world. And He understands that they will be sent into the world, and He prays for their effectiveness in that venture.

And in this final section, in verses 20 to 26, Jesus prays for you. He prays for you. He knows you by name.

And 2,000 years ago, as Jesus perhaps is even walking by the temple at this point with His disciples on the way to the Mount of Olives, on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus may have even paused at the temple mount before exiting the city of Jerusalem, and there He prays for you.

[5 : 36] What is on Jesus' mind? What is of utmost significance to Jesus as He makes this personal appeal? He has, as a concern, your unity.

The oneness that you have with the rest of the body. That is what is on His mind, and that's what He prays for. That is what is significant, and that's what we'll look at this morning.

Well, as you know, our family had an opportunity over the past three weeks to get away, and as with every vacation, there are those planned things and those unplanned things.

The planned things come as a result of preparation, and I have my wife to thank for hours of preparation. That is not my skill set. So she is faithful in making sure we get to the ultimate destination.

Otherwise, we'll eventually get there, but how we get there will be a mystery if it was up to me. So there are these planned things, and she was careful to plan and prepare, but then the unplanned things, that's my department.

[6 : 48] And one of the unplanned things was a hundred hours in the car, and with a family of eight, that can be a challenge, but by God's grace, it ended up being a blessing.

The planned things of seeing certain places of the country and just enjoying the scenery of God's grandeur, whether it be in the Sequoia National Park or whether it be the coastline of the Pacific Ocean or whether it be in the Grand Canyon.

Wherever God showed up, it was spectacular to see His handiwork. But one of the things that I didn't expect, one of the things that was a little bit of a surprise to me and a blessing, as I reflect, probably one of the highlights of the trip is understanding and appreciating the significance of this aspect of unity.

That wherever we went across the country, whoever's house in which we stayed, there was a companionship, there was a unity in the gospel. There was harmony and unity between us.

I want to show you a couple of pictures here just to kind of paint the scene. And unfortunately, it's a little dark, but you can see, there we are in our tree house.

[8 : 11] This is the tree house that my family built, my kids and I built, and we knocked on the door of neighbors, or the owners that we had never met who bought our house and we said, hey, can we get into the backyard and take a picture?

They're like, who are these people? Sure, I mean, what else do we say? So there we are, we're taking a picture with some neighbors that we had built into, relationships that we had established, and there we are standing in just remembering the good times there in Aurora, Illinois.

Here we are in Culver's after the morning service where not just one church met with us, but a couple, two or three different groups of individuals from various churches and ministries that we had been a part of gathered together at Culver's.

We packed the place out, and there was this beautiful arrangement of harmony as we fellowshiped with God's people because of the common connection in Jesus Christ.

Next picture. Here we're moving across the country, and in the bottom you see we're in Salt Lake City, and there on the right-hand side you see we're with some distant family members that most of us have never met.

[9 : 35] But for the fact that we share a common connection in Jesus, there was this beautiful spirit of, we've been friends all the time.

Next picture. Here we are now making our way into California, and this particular family actually stayed with us. They're from New Zealand, and he was going to the Master's Seminary.

They didn't have a place to stay, so they stayed in our 1,200-foot house. They were in the front part of the house sharing with their four children, and we were in the back part of the house staying with our four kids, and the connection, the relationship has continued through the years.

Next picture. Here we are with family at the Sequoia National Park. What a great time of enjoyment and encouragement and mutual connections.

Next picture. Now we're beginning to make our way back home, and there are friends from college, and there are friends from a ministry in Southern California, and there are friends that housed Sarah when she was a student at the Master's College.

[10 : 50] All connections that were made decades ago, and yet the friendship that was kindled at that point continue to be nurtured, continue to be encouraged.

Through this experience, I was reminded of the significance of the unity of the body of Christ. I was encouraged and challenged at the significance of maintaining and pursuing peace within the body of Christ.

I was challenged and encouraged with the significance of being able to go to new places or old places and being able to not avoid people.

But because of pursuing peace, we can pick up where we left off. We can overlook some of those old difficulties. We can continue to enjoy sweet fellowship.

That was unexpected. That was a blessing. It reinforces this message this morning, the significance of the unity of the body of Christ and what that unity does for the sake of the gospel.

[12 : 09] It's not a coincidence that we come to this passage here at this moment in the calendar year where we are finishing the small group series on the art of neighboring and we are beginning this summer series on relationships, a mess worth making.

we see in this passage the integration of these two concepts and the significance of loving those who are outside the church while reinforcing the connection that we have with one another within the church.

These beautiful portraits of harmony that give testimony to the greatness of our God. It is our unity that speaks to the wonder of our God.

Here Jesus in his prayer before he is to be betrayed and handed over and crucified prays for you this morning prays for you that you would be a person who understands and embraces the significance of unity within the body of Christ.

It is so important in fact that the impact of the entire earthly ministry of Jesus rests on your willingness to do what Jesus prays here in this passage.

[13 : 39] Rests on the Father's ability to work that through in your life and we'll look at that this morning. As we talk about the significance of unity why is it important and how does it show up in our midst?

I want to try to answer three questions related to unity and break that out for us in the time that we have left this morning. The first question I want to address is what does our unity say to the world?

What does our unity say to the world? We find the answer of that in verse 21 and verse 23. Look at that with me in John chapter 17. If you're a guest with us today and don't have a Bible feel free to use the one in front of you it's on page 903.

John chapter 17 I'm going to read verses 20 21 and 23. Jesus says this I do not ask for these only but also for those who will believe in me through their word that they may 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.

Now drop down to 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.

[15 : 09] I want to concentrate on this key phrase the key phrase that you'll see in both of these verses so that so that or in order that indicating that what Jesus is hoping to establish is in order for his ministry to be confirmed through his people there needs to be authenticating work in their life and that authenticating work in their life is the work of unity the work of harmony the spirit creating a sense of being joined together Jesus is indicating that the confirming witness to his life changing message of the gospel is the unity of God's people in that without unity the gospel will be rendered ineffective let me say that again without unity the gospel may be rendered ineffective how can I say that so emphatically notice that

Jesus prays this same thing for his disciples if you back up to verse 11 you see that Jesus prays the same thing for them he says that they may be one even as we are one and the result of that we find in verse 20 is he's not only praying for his disciples but then he can pray for those who will follow in the succession those who are impacted by the power of the gospel those who are impacted by the testimony of the disciples unity and those who believe through their word will also emulate the same kind of character the same kind of spirit it will flow through their lives why will they believe well certainly because of the power of the word Paul says that in Romans chapter 1 he says I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes we believe in the power of the gospel it's power to do its work but we also understand that there is an accompanying power that helps to reinforce and to demonstrate to illustrate that the gospel does truly have power power to change power to transform power to make new we see in Jesus ministry that he did not just come with words but that

Jesus came with confirming wonders he came with the wonders of miracles the wonders of healing the wonders of casting out demons his authority in speaking his ability to influence nature the wind and the waves were at his command Jesus attested himself to the people that he was ministering to through the works that he did Jesus said as much moments before if you turn over to John chapter 14 you can see that Jesus draws attention to this very fact to his disciples just a few moments earlier John chapter 14 verses 10 and 11 says this do you not believe that I am in the father and the father is in me the words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority but the father who dwells in me does his works believe in me that I am in the father and the father is in me or else believe on the account of the works themselves the works that I do give testimony to the authority of God in my life

I would like to suggest this morning that we have a similar strategy in our gospel endeavors there is an accompanying work that God calls us to be a part of now it's not the work of miracles or the work of healing that Jesus was a part of but it is the work of the spirit in your life to create a harmonious and unified group of faith filled people Jesus has given us this affirming work the work of unity within our church to help give testimony to the power of the gospel if you look at John chapter 13 again on the same night that Jesus is praying this prayer and giving this message to his disciples reinforces this statement in John 13 34 to 35 when he says this a new commandment

I give to you that you love one another just as I have loved you you also are to love one another by this will all people know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another if there is no love there is no power but the spirit has come into your life to change you radically with the love of God so that you can communicate that love to one another and be joined together as a testimony as a work as a confirmation to the world that the gospel is real the gospel is potent the gospel is capable to change to deliver to save and that's what Jesus is praying he's praying for his people that the testimony of unity would be true in their lives to confirm the reality of the gospel the power of the gospel question number two but what does our unity say about our

[21 : 28] God okay we understand why it's significant in the world maybe we come to grips with the fact that unity is important in reinforcing the gospel but what does our unity say about our God now there are several things and we don't have time to really delve into the details but I want to just draw them to your attention and let you see that our unity actually fills out the gospel it's through our unity that people get this beautiful portrait of our Savior in all of these ways people can connect to God because of the way that one the first question the first evidence of

God that our unity demonstrates is that our God is one our God is one shows the unity of the Godhead representing Father Son and Holy Spirit can any of us explain the mystery of the Trinity one God and yet three persons Jesus throughout his ministry demonstrates the incredible harmony of his ministry with the Father speaking the Father's words doing the Father's works being guided by the Father's direction so that in John chapter 12 just turn the page over to John chapter 12 verses 49 and 50 Jesus says this I've not spoken on my own authority but the Father who has sent me has given me a command what to say and what to speak I don't know what his command is eternal life what

I say therefore I say as the Father has told me so unified was Jesus his ministry with the Father so harmonious that in this last night with his disciples when the question comes up Jesus says I'm going to the Father and remember Thomas says where are you going and Philip responds Lord show us the Father and it is enough in John chapter 14 verse 8 Lord show us the Father and it's enough for us he says in John 14 9 Jesus responds have I been with you so long and you still do not know me Philip whoever has seen me has seen the Father how can you say show us the Father Jesus is a little exasperated with Philip at this point and the rest of the disciples for that matter how can

I have a ministry with you for so many years and you still don't get it but we can identify can't we we can understand the wonder of the deepness of having been taught so many things in your past and Jesus shattered their concept of God God is one but God is existing in three persons Father Son and Holy Spirit but surprisingly and beautifully Jesus communicates that the ministry or the mystery of the Trinity although mind boggling begins to find some clarity in the way that we deal with each other the unity of the church actually serves to clarify this great mystery so that the world can get a glimpse of the oneness of God through the oneness of his church wow is that awesome amazing one of the greatest deepest richest doctrines in the

Bible can be illustrated through your unity my unity with one another in the church amazing that God gives us the privilege of illustrating him in that degree second question also in verse 21 notice it says John 17 21 towards the end that they also may be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me that you have sent me number two our God is real our God is real we hear all the time Jesus is just a fairy!

[26 : 41] tale or we hear that Jesus was a historical figure he did maybe some great things he certainly was a prophet maybe a good example he may have even been commissioned by God to do these things but in terms of Jesus being divinity of course not it's just a figment of the disciples imagination listen Jesus prays for you that you be united in love with the family of God why because Jesus knows that the unity of the church will provide undeniable evidence to the power of the gospel and the reality of Jesus listen we live in a world that is polarized opinions and and perspectives and people's convictions that are so skewed and so discombobulated you can't even seem to have a civil conversation anymore these days because of how polarized our culture is what an opportunity for the church to shine the light of the gospel through the transforming work of the spirit in helping to create a unified people to illustrate that

Jesus is real but it only comes that way one look at this world demonstrates the utter futility of unity apart from Christ and yet through faith and through the power of the spirit the gospel can explode with power should be no surprise that the early church experienced the power of God because of their unified approach to one another verse 22 gives us the answer to our third question it says this the glory that you have given me I have given to them that they may be one even as we are one third is God is glorious God is glorious this truth should take your breath away the omnipotent omnipresent omniscient holy all wise supreme and sovereign

God imparts his glory to you think of it the thought of God's glory captures John's attention beginning with the first chapter he says in the beginning was the word the word was with God and the word was God he says and the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory the glory of the only begotten of the father full of grace and truth and as God's people are unified and illustrate the grace and truth of their savior they illustrate and show the glory of God and they are able to share in some way with him in that glory Paul describes this in 2nd Corinthians he says but we all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the

Lord are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory just as by the spirit of the Lord the more you know God the more you love God the more you pursue God the more you obey God the more you seek to know God the more you look like God and the more glorious God becomes in this world because of your witness but it doesn't happen individually it doesn't happen for you individually it happens for us as we demonstrate the unified work of the spirit in becoming a people who are connected the glory of Christ shows up collectively through the unified commitment of the body of Christ to one another verse 23 we find our God is love our God is love

I in them and you in me that they may become perfectly one so that the world may know that you have sent me and love them even as you loved me Jesus is emphatic about this first part he he he he has already made a similar statement in verse 21 but and he reinforces it here in verse 23 the world will know that I'm real because of their unity but he builds on that and says in continuation the world will also know that you have sent me and love them even as you love me what does our unity produce it says that God is real but it also says that our God is a God of interested and passionate and zealous and initiating love our fellowship with one another illustrates and confirms that we can also have fellowship with

[32 : 25] God which would have blown the people of the first century away for them God was distant only accessible through ritual and through ceremony and through law and through priests and through an intermediary but Jesus obliterated all of those obstacles through his death on the cross and it says we who once were aliens and strangers have been brought near by the blood of Christ God is love the gospel is accessible and as the people of God demonstrate a connection with one another they demonstrate that God desires fellowship with them too with the world verse 24 God is savior God is savior father he says 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 what Satan sought to disrupt in the garden what Satan sought to destroy was creation giving glory to God he thought he won when he got Adam and Eve to sin but Jesus as savior elected before the foundation of the world to come and to deliver his people from sin states categorically I am victorious over sin and death I have conquered once for all the darkness blindness and spiritual death was overcome in him he obliterated conquered the enemies of us that separated us from the father the plan of the ages was now intact with the coming of

Christ and now we anticipate the final consummation of that in salvation in his second return when he comes our God is savior and one day those who are in Christ who have accepted him by faith will be able to behold him as Jesus communicates we will see him in all of his glory we will marvel we will worship verse 25 answers the question our God is righteous our God is righteous verse 25 Jesus is praying oh righteous father even though the world does not know you I know you and these know that you have sent me let's not assume that the worldly way of unity is God's way of unity let's not assume that unity comes at the expense of truth let's not assume that we play fast and loose about the standards that

God has for our lives let's not assume that as lights of the world we are not commanded to show forth that light Jesus says in the sermon on the mount you are the light of the world a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden and Paul says you were once darkness but now you are light in the Lord walk as children of the light and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather expose them those who are committed to one another in loving affection and a zeal for God's holiness and truth will be those who manifest the character of Christ in being people of truth and grace confrontation robed in tenderness and gentleness with the end goal of restoration desire to preserve them from the consequences of sin a desire to rescue them from the hardship that they'll face because of walking away from

God's perfect standard Paul says he says love does not rejoice in iniquity but love rejoices in the truth are you a person who loves are you a person who is working towards real and authentic unity with the people that God has put you in relationship with and finally verse 26 our God is present I made known to them your name I will continue to make it known that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them God is present and he is present through his people when people see the character of Christ showing up in the people of Christ they say there's a person who shows me that

[38 : 00] God is present and that's when the power of the gospel begins to have its effect finally and quickly what does our unity say to the saints what does this mean in terms of our relationship with one another and there are so many places where I can go but I want to just point out a couple of contrasts I want to communicate what would willful division look like and what might be some examples of passive division if Jesus is interested in our unity!

Our unity is significant to reinforce the gospel we can understand that having unity is important for us as a church so what gets in the way what are some ways that we disrupt the unity that God desires for his people well I think there are some active ways we do this and some passive ways here are some active examples we get involved in petty squabbles we allow there to be unresolved conflict we are unwilling to forgive or let go of hurt maybe we refuse to lay down our personal preferences for the sake of the body perhaps it's because we will not affirm the value of the others who are in our midst we want to be preeminent we don't want to reinforce the giftedness of other people we want to have that job we want to do that thing maybe we refuse to address sin with grace and gentleness either we ignore it on the one hand and just let it go or on the other hand we are so firm and so harsh that there is no spirit of gentleness or desire the body there's no forgiveness maybe there's an unwillingness for you to confess sin you can justify it you can defend it but you're certainly not going to confess it maybe this morning you're holding on to bitterness those are some active ways that we get in the way of unity but there are some passive ways that we do this too perhaps you're here this morning and you are just a

Sunday morning and be encouraged through the song time and be ministered to in various ways but as it relates to you serving it's just not for you you don't have the time for that it's just not comfortable it leads to disruption within the body how about being one who listens to complaints you may not participate in spreading them around but you're a good sounding board for them you're passively involved in division perhaps you're comfortable in your current relationships without a desire or interest to look around and to see who are some people some faces that I haven't recognized before some names of individuals I don't know they've even been coming here for several years but I haven't gone out of my way to make a connection with them that's a passive way of adding to division maybe fellowship with the saints is not a priority for you other things get in the way maybe you're indifferent to the needs of others you're disinterested you're apathetic you just don't care perhaps there's prayerlessness in you or a lack of loyalty whatever it might be this morning that is creating a spirit of disruption and disunity within the church if we want to be potent witnesses of the gospel we've got to ask for the father's help in identifying those issues in our lives and being humble enough to hear what he says so that we can be powerful in our witness for

Jesus let's pray! it's our desire Lord this morning to behold the example of your son Jesus who prayed for us specifically that we would be people who are so unified together that it gives testimony powerful witness to the transforming strength of God's work in our life God may we do that faithfully may we do that eagerly and may that be the expression of our constant desire we pray in Jesus name Amen