

What Does Jesus Pray for the Church?

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Actually, 15 starts the same way, 20 does.

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

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

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

[1 : 40] O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

This is the word of the Lord. You know, it's common for us to never forget someone's last words. Folks said that Beethoven's last words were, I shall hear in heaven.

He was deaf, if you didn't know. Years later, the dying Notre Dame coach, or football player, George Gibb, was said to have told the football team, or the football coach, win one for the Gipper.

It's a famous phrase that's gotten even into political language. You know, after reading the story of Lazarus to my own grandfather, his final words to me were, I believe.

I'll never forget it. So, too, throughout the scripture, last words are repeatedly recorded in our Bibles. Jacob, as we remember last summer, Jacob gathered his 12 sons and pronounced a blessing on them.

[3 : 02] Moses, too, blessed the people of Israel as they stood on the precipice of the promised land, even though he would not go into it with them.

King David called his people to remember the everlasting covenant with his final words. And so, too, we have spent 14 mornings studying these last words of Jesus to his disciples.

On the night he was to be betrayed, what did he say? That's what we've been unpacking. But unlike Jacob, Moses, and David, Jesus does not conclude by blessing his disciples.

He concludes by praying for them. It's a stunning scene. Imagining our Lord making his way out to the Garden of Gethsemane and praying to his Father with only his disciples in earshot.

But now Jesus lifts his eyes beyond just his disciples with his final words and prays for all those who will follow him in every generation.

[4 : 10] We saw right there in verse 20, I do not ask for these only, that is, the disciples only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.

Those who will believe throughout the first generation, the second, and all the way down to this one. I'm praying for all who believe in me. In these final verses, the Lord is praying for Augustine and William Tyndale, for Katerina Van Bora and John Bunyan, for Amy Carmichael and R.C. Sproul, and the Lord is praying for you.

Think about this. On the night he was betrayed, the Lord had all his people in mind for what he was about to do and prayed for all who would come to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Well did one author say, there is no Christian alive who has not had Christ mention his or her name to the Father.

Even more wonderful, it's not as though he prays here and stops praying for us. Hebrews 7 says he ever lives to make intercession for the saints.

[5 : 26] Is anything more faith-building and faith-strengthening than that? You know, it's a wonderful thing to have someone lay their hands on you and pray for you.

But how much more to realize Jesus Christ is praying for you. Robert Murray Machane says, if I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies.

Yet distance makes no difference. He is praying for me. Whom shall I fear? Of whom shall I be afraid? And knowing that Christ prays for us is an extraordinary reality.

But what does he pray? And John gives us a bit of a window here. Jesus prays for us. Prays for what we must remember while we wait to spend eternity with him.

Jesus prays for what we must remember while we remain in the world, while we're left behind and separated from him. He does not pray for the world, per se, but the world is always in view, as we'll see.

[6 : 33] He's praying for us to live in such a way that the world may know who he is in the unfathomable love of God that sent him into the world.

So where we're going in a word is live now, united together in the good of the gospel as you await Christ's return. Live now, united together in the good of the gospel as you await Christ's return.

I'm going to break this out in three simple words. The first word is unity. The first word is unity. So if we try to summarize what Jesus prays in this last prayer, the first thing he prays for is unity.

Right at the outset, the fact that he's not just praying for his disciples, but for all who follow him in every generation is carefully underlined. Look in verse 20. He says, I ask for these only, not for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.

Who are those who believe that he's talking about? Not those who believe through his word, which is the disciples who were made clean by the word of the gospel, as we know from John 15, 7.

[7 : 43] They are those who believe through their word. As Jesus has implied in making very explicit here, the mission will continue after he leaves.

He has more sheep that are not of this fold, more children of God that are scattered, that need to be gathered in, and they will be found. They will be searched. They will be gathered by the word, not of Jesus, but by the word of the disciples.

The story of Christianity is wonderfully, it is all about a word, but the story of Christianity is not just this word, but it's this word proclaimed through the words of witnesses, of eyewitnesses.

That's the way it's traveled all the way down to you and me. And so Jesus continues and says, my desire is that after they're found, after they're gathered, that they may all be one.

Look in verse 21. I pray for them that they may all be one. Jesus has already prayed for them to be gathered as one.

[8 : 47] If you remember earlier in this chapter, he prayed for, he knew they were going to be scattered this night. Judas would betray him and all of the disciples would forsake him and leave him alone to suffer on Gogotha, Gogotha's cross.

But Jesus is praying not merely for an earthly gathering here, but for something greater. The whole goal of being sent into the world was to gather his people throughout every generation into one.

One flock with one shepherd, one vine with many branches, one children of God, one church, no longer two, but one, no longer Jew and Gentile, but one people of God throughout every generation.

That's what Jesus is praying for. He's praying for his disciples and all who follow him to be united as one. It's important to see what exactly is the unity he's praying for here.

Look again in verse 21. They all may, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they may be in us.

[10 : 01] The unity Jesus is praying for is not merely about them being with one another. Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young famously said, love the one you're with.

I mean, how can you love or be one with someone you're not with? But Jesus is not mainly praying for them to be with one another and to never leave one another.

Nor is Jesus mainly praying for them to form a united group. Now, Christians, they do weird things. But Christians, you know, they form groups.

They form churches. They form schools. They form voting blocks. They begin to dress like one another, talk like one another, school like one another. But it's not always for the good.

To the church in Corinth, Paul said, you gather together, but it would be better if you didn't gather together. Ananias and Sapphira were united as one, but it was not so good.

[11 : 05] The Jonestown community was so united that they all drank the Kool-Aid. Jesus is not praying for mere unity. Do you see?

Rather, Jesus is praying for us to realize the unfathomable unity we share in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And let that unity control everything.

It's at precisely these points where our Lord and the Gospel of John gets most difficult to understand. What is he praying for? They may be one just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you that they may also be in us.

He's praying for us to be one with him in such a way that it reflects the unity of the Trinity. Indeed, we're invited into that perfect unity.

All throughout the Gospel, Jesus said, I and the Father am one. I only do the things the Father is doing. If you want to see the Father, take a look at me. But now he's saying, you and I are included in this oneness of relationship with God.

[12 : 16] The whole goal of all of his work and being sent into the world was not to get you through the gates of heaven, but to bring you into this intimate community with God.

Christianity is not a religion that can be privatized and kept in your heart. This unity is meant to control our interactions with others.

We cannot have unity with the Trinity apart from unity with earthly saints. I recently read a story or heard a story about the hit TV show, The Crown.

Now, I have never watched The Crown, so you can give me back my man card. But The Crown is a dramatization of the life of Queen Elizabeth, who I have read about over the years.

And one of the early episodes, Queen Elizabeth's father, King George VI, takes Prince Philip, Elizabeth's future husband, duck hunting, like the bourgeoisie might do.

[13 : 25] He does this so that he can have a talk with Prince Philip and break the news to him that if he's going to marry the queen and fulfill that role well, he's going to have to give up everything.

He's going to have to give up his naval career, his personal aspiration, and give his undivided devotion and support to his wife, the queen.

King George looks at Philip and says, The politics and the public service and the ceremonies, that's not the job. She's the job.

Her well-being is the job. After ascending the heights of the Trinity, the Lord is saying something quite similar to us, saying, brothers and sisters, as we gather together, as we worship together, as we consider again that we're together, branches of one vine, members of one body, living stones of one house, a bride of one husband, let us remember she's the job.

The Christian life is a radically externally focused life. You know, we live in a divided day. Someone tried to assassinate former President Trump last Saturday evening.

[14 : 45] But the church is to be a place where people are filled with the Spirit and united with the same mind. If marriage is to be one flesh, then the church, those in the church, are to be one soul, united in communion with God and with one another, united in the mind of Christ.

Not united mainly in being with one another, not united in voting the same way as one another, but united in the mind of Christ, that is, laying down our lives for one another.

United in never forgetting that one died for all so that all who follow Him might die and no longer live for themselves. United in allegiance to Jesus Christ. Here's the reality.

And we've said this over the years. If our unity is little more, as a church, if our unity is little more than a social club, united because we dress the same or talk the same or school the same or vote the same or spend the money the same way, then no one in the world would be surprised.

That's just a block of people united because of some earthly affinity. But if we're united because of Jesus Christ, if we're a bunch of people with different backgrounds and different preferences and different convictions on lesser things, if we persevere with one another and walk with one another, refuse to slander one another, the world will be left scratching their head.

[16 : 15] That's exactly what our Lord says. That's exactly what He prays for. Look in verse 21. So that, He prays all this, so that in a world of division, the world may believe that you have sent me.

The world may believe the reality that Jesus Christ has interrupted this world and left people with His mind. See, true unity is not uniformity.

It's not groupthink. It's not a voting block. It's not a marriage of convenience. True unity is a people with different backgrounds who would not be friends apart from Jesus. And unity, that unity is so unworldly and otherworldly that the world begins to believe that Jesus is who He says He is.

So how is our unity? How are we? Do we dwell more on one another's graces or one another's weaknesses and failures?

Surely God dwells more on our graces, but do we dwell more on them?

[17 : 33] Do we give a charitable interpretation of the things we see in one another's life? Or do we give the worst interpretation of why they didn't call?

I remember years ago, my wife and I, well, actually our whole family was at the Orange and White game, which is UT, the real UT's intramural game every spring.

And we were on a tight budget. I think we were doing the cash envelopes things, which is, you know, not for the faint of heart, trying to get things in order.

And I asked my wife to go up and get us some popcorn. Now, by the end of the story, you're going to hate my guts. But I asked her to go get us some popcorn, and we were on a tight budget.

I just said, just go up there and get one thing of popcorn. And we're watching the game. I got all the kids that are hanging around on me. And when she comes back down the aisle, she has two things of popcorn.

[18 : 37] I'm like, man, can't even leave my own wife. You know, what's going on? I was just steaming in my heart. As she got closer down the aisle, I realized she had one thing of full popcorn and one empty container so that she could share the popcorn among the kids.

Now, thanks be to God. I didn't say anything to her about what I thought was going on, but it's an illustration of how we're so tempted to put the harshest interpretation on those around us.

We're always interpreting. Why didn't she call? Why did he have this big party and not invite me? Or whatever it is, all of these things.

Are we like that? Do we put a harsh interpretation? Do we judge one another? So Jesus prays for unity that would leave this world's jaw wide open.

Jesus also prays for glory. Look in verse 22. Jesus prays for glory for the church, prays for them to realize more and more of what he came to do.

[19 : 57] All throughout this prayer, Jesus has been praying for glory. He said, glorify me, Father, with the glory I had before the foundation of the world. Then he says, I have glorified you, Father.

Now glorify me. Look what he prays, though, in verse 22. He says, the glory that you have given me, I have given to them that they may be one, even as we are one.

So he's continuing to hang on that theme. I in them and you in me, that they may be perfectly one. So the glory that you've given me, glory you gave me, I have given to them.

Now glory, as we've talked about, is one of these Christian words that we don't often know what it means, but it's just a way of saying, glory, it's just the greatness of God going public.

It's the making known of his greatness, the making known of his majesty and grace. So Jesus is saying, when he said, the glory you've given me, I've given to them. He said, I've made known to them who you are.

[20 : 55] We know that no one has seen God, the only God, Jesus Christ has made him known. So he's saying, I've showed them your greatness, your grace and truth. I've completed the task for which you sent me.

Yours they were. You gave them to me. I saw them and found them and I brought them into the glory of the truth of who you are.

So Jesus is saying to the Father, this is what I've done. Now there's another thing going on here. Throughout this prayer, Jesus has made a request and then reminded the Father of what he's done.

So he prayed, glorify me and I will glorify you. Then he says, I did, I have glorified you. Later he prays, keep them in your name.

Then he says, Father, I kept them in your name while I was here. Sanctify them in the truth as we saw last week. But then he says, I consecrate them.

[21 : 56] So Jesus is about to pray, let them see my glory. And now he says, I gave them glory. Look in verse 24, 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 love me before the foundation of the world.

Jesus is saying, I want them to see all of my glory. Now Jesus, when he called the disciples to himself, he gave them the right to become children of God.

We know that. But for all who did receive him, who believed in a name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And now Jesus is praying, Lord, I want to exchange the right of a child of God into the full access and blessing of the child of God, the full possession of the child of God, and that is to see my glory.

Now we could spend all morning unpacking this single request. He begins, he interrupts again his prayer with, Father, this is the fourth time he says, Father, in this prayer relating to the eternal God.

He says, I desire, I want. He's saying, Father, this is what I want.

[23 : 39] Growing up in our house, we weren't allowed to say, I want something, lest we get a bad case of the I wants. But Jesus is praying, Lord, Father, I want those whom you've given me.

Now listen to this. I want those who've given me to be right where I am so that they might see my glory, so that they might finally see who I am. Jesus has already told the disciples his plan.

If I go and prepare a place with you, I will take you to where I am, that where I am you may also be. Now he's calling on the Father to do what he promised, to bring his children home so that he might, they might share his glory with them.

I love the way you see this in our culture. These share the glory moments. Several weeks ago, Tennessee baseball team won the national championship, and there was so much celebration in our house when they won.

But the thing that struck me the most was Tony Vitello running over to his dad and his dad weeping on his shoulder. He could have ran to so many other people in that moment, but who did he want to run to?

[24 : 52] He wanted to run to his dad who saw him work on baseball all throughout his life, no doubt took him to so many different games, prayed for him for all these different opportunities he had.

And so when he wins, who does he want to hug? He wants to hug his dad. He wants him to share the victory. Well, there's a similar thing going on right here that Jesus is saying, Father, I want them to share my victory.

I want them to see my glory. He's saying, as it were, to these disciples, you will soon see me despised and rejected, spat upon and mocked.

You will see me hung naked, alone. Most of you will be crucified after me for following me and confessing your name. But he's not just praying for those disciples.

He's praying for all who follow him, others who will follow him and will see his name trampled and blasphemed and ridiculed. The thing that should lead to the deepest sorrow in our hearts is not our reputation being damaged, but the reputation of Jesus Christ being ridiculed in this world.

[26 : 08] Blasphemed. And so he's saying, all those who've seen all that, I want them to see my glory, Father. Show them my glory.

But Jesus is also praying and saying, I want them to be with me. I want them to be with me.

Thomas Goodwin, one of these old Puritans said, it's as if he had said, the truth is, I cannot live without you.

I shall never be quiet till I have you where I am. That so we may never part again. That is the reason of it.

Heaven shall not hold me nor my Father's company if I have not you with me. my heart is so set upon you. And if I have any glory, you shall have part of it.

[27 : 23] Think about that. I don't know about you, most days I don't want to be with me. To think that the greatest being in the universe says, Father, I want them to be with me for eternity.

To see my unconditional love. But notice, after he prays for glory, the world is still in view. Look at verse 23. He says, I'm praying for that glory, the glory I've given to them.

I'm praying they be one and imperfectly one so that the world may know that you sent me and love them even as you loved me. I've given them glory that they may be one so that the world may know that you sent them and loved them, sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

Now we would suppose that that phrase would go like this. I want them to be perfectly one that the world may know that you sent me and love me. but he says, I want them to be perfectly one so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them as you loved me.

the goal of this unity and glory is that the world might see the love of the Father for his children. Jesus said earlier in these final words that people will know you are my disciples if you love one another.

[28 : 57] Now he's saying they will know you're my disciples by my love for you. How does the world see the love of the Father for his people?

By setting them free. You know, perfect protection does not cast out fear. Those guys that have the no fear on the back of their truck are the scariest person on the planet. Perfect security does not cast out fear.

Even perfect knowledge does not cast out fear. only perfect love casts out fear. So how does the world know how does the world know when it sees someone loved by God?

They see someone set free. They see someone who cannot be bought and sold. They see someone who's not angling for position aching for approval chasing after applause.

They see someone who's not trying to perform for their parents or their peers or to cover up their path. They see someone who's not trying even to perform for themselves. They see someone who's truly free and rejoicing in God.

[30 : 06] See, this is where Christianity stands out again. Every other worldly religion, every other religion says you must live a certain way and then you get the verdict over your life in the end.

But Christianity says you get the verdict now and then you live your life. So one says you've got to do these things. Whatever it is, Nirvana or attain in some hill or whatever it is, you're climbing some sort of mountain so that you can get the verdict.

But Christianity announces that the verdict has come because the punishment fell on Jesus. So now you just live in the good of it. So now that you can just sing that hymn like the old saying, I sing because I'm happy.

I sing because I'm free. His eye is on the sparrow and I know he watches me. So what does the world see when it sees someone loved by God?

It sees someone who just walks through it without worrying about their worries. Truly set free, rejoicing in God.

[31 : 08] Finally, Jesus also prays for love. Jesus concludes his prayer by praying for love for the church.

Some say in these final verses, Jesus is summarizing the prayer and that might be it, but it seems to me that these verses establish the reason why he makes those first two requests.

So he prays for unity and he prays for glory because he'll continue to be at work in them until he returns.

He assures his disciples that his ministry will continue after he leaves. Look in verse 25. He says, even though the world does not know you, Father, 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. Jesus is getting more explicit that the mission is going to continue.

[32 : 21] The mission will not be for the disciples to stay as the 12 and remember what Jesus said but to take what they learned from Jesus to the end of the earth. And so he's saying, I will be taking a different place but I will not be taking up a different ministry.

I will continue to make known your name. What is that? Make known your character, your goodness, your mercy, your revelation until the end.

I'll reveal to you who God is and what he has done and do that throughout the world. Continues to make it known that they may know the internal love of God behind it all.

Look at verse 26 again the way he concludes. This is another one of those purpose clauses that run through this that the world may believe that you have sent me that the world may know that you sent me and love me.

I made them known look at verse 26 and I will continue to make it known that the love with which you love me may be in them and I in them. The love with which you love me may be in them and I in them.

[33 : 33] So even though he will no longer be with them he's saying I will be in you and the love of God. Consider the scope of which Jesus is praying here.

The love with which you have loved me refers to the love that was before the foundation of the world. It was a love that never began between God the Father and God the Son.

And yet Jesus prays that that love with which you love me before the foundation of the world may be in them may remain in them and be with them.

He's tracing the source of all of this ministry. What was the ultimate source of all of the ministry of God in the world the creating of the world the rescuing of sinners from the wrath of God.

It was not because he was lonely or needed a few more people to hang out with it was the love of God to display his grace and mercy in Jesus Christ the whole purpose of creating the world and sending Jesus into the world was to display this love.

[34 : 54] David Wells says helpfully the Christian faith began in the eternal counsels of God without the incarnation death and resurrection of Christ there would be no Christian faith but without the eternal counsel of God there would have been no incarnation atonement and resurrection.

That God has thus planned our redemption from all eternity delivers a declaration louder than any thunderclap. It is that he is for us that he has always been for us that he did not just know us before the foundation of the world but that he loved us set his affection on us and did all that was necessary to bring us into right relation with him and so he prays that the love with which the father loved him for all eternity may rest in them forever.

How does the father love us? yet we come into the love of the father with all sorts of baggage even as Daniel shared a word of encouragement this morning that gets at that we so often think the love of the father is like the love that our father had for us far too often based more on our performance than anything else based more on how we did that day but the love of the father for the son from eternity is one defined by delight there's several moments in scripture where the delight of the father just kind of breaks out you know if you remember Jesus' baptism as the spirit comes down in the form of a dove and Jesus is baptized the father just breaks out and says this is my son with whom

I'm well pleased later in his transfiguration the disciples or the inner core of the disciples are gathered before him they see him for who he really is they said this is my beloved son listen to him this is the one that he loved that he promised that he sent and that's the way the father loves you the scriptures say with absolute delight because of Christ several years ago I read a book called Tattoos on the Heart about a man working streets of California ministering the gospel tells a story about a friend of his named Bill he says my touchstone image of God comes by way of my friend Bill years ago Bill cared for his father as he died of cancer Bill's father had become a frail man depended on Bill to do everything for him though he was physically not what he had been and the disease was wasting him away his mind remained alert and lively in the role reversal common to adult children who care for dying parents

Bill would put his father to bed and read him to sleep each night exactly as his father had done for him as a child Bill would read from some novel and his father would lie there staring at his son smiling Bill was exhausted from a day's care if you've ever cared for a dying parent you know what that's like he's exhausted from a day's care and work and would plead with his dad look dad here's the idea I read to you and you go to sleep I read you sleep this isn't complicated Bill's father would impiously apologize and dutifully close his eyes but this wouldn't last long soon enough Bill's father would pop open one eye and smile at his son Bill would catch him more and whine now come on dad you remember the rules of engagement here

[39 : 16] I read you sleep the father would again oblige until he couldn't anymore and the other eye would open to catch a glimpse of his son this went on and on and after his father's death Bill knew that this evening ritual was really a story of a father who couldn't take his eyes off his son how much more so of God that's what Jesus is saying I love you like I love my own son not because you're so great we are after all sinful and straying and weak and frail but because he's so great so merciful and so kind for God so love you he sent his only son so you might believe in him have everlasting life and never outgrow his love

Jesus concludes this prayer saying saying the love with which you love me I pray for that to be in them and I in them no longer with them but I'll be in them and I'll be in them until I'm with them forever so live now united together in the good of this gospel as you await the return of our Lord father in heaven we cast ourselves onto you offer ourselves sincerely completely we thank you for the unspeakable realities that you were before us or for us before anything existed and you've been for us all along we pray that you'd help us as we lean into these incomprehensible truth that you have to give us strength to comprehend what is the love of God the length the width and the height and the depth of this love that surpasses knowledge that we might be filled with all the fullness of God we thank you and we praise you hide in you this day amen you've been listening to a message given by Walt

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