

Jesus Prays for You

John 17:20-26

At the meeting of our presbytery this past weekend we received charges that were presented against a pastor—charges of lying, slander and causing schism. The charges came in the context of a church where two ruling elders and large portion of the church left to form a new and separate church last year. A church divided, and split. And now charges. In my opinion, the charges were not warranted by the situation, but needless to say, there is an obvious and complete lack of unity there.

We also had a report about another minister, a former missionary, whose wife left him nearly two years ago and has filed for divorce, with allegations of abuse against her husband. A family broken apart, a ministry all but ended, and now another committee of presbytery erected to formulate possible charges against this minister to determine if those allegations are true. Presbytery really didn't know what to do with the situation. But needless to say, there is an obvious and complete lack of unity.

Then there is the situation of your own pastor, who needs to have one of our Ruling Elders by his side the whole time, to avoid being inappropriately accosted from those who filed charges against me a year and a half ago, charges which were dismissed last April with no resolution of the underlying grievances that came out of that painful controversy in Atlanta.

With all of that on my mind as I prepared this sermon, two thoughts came to the forefront of my mind. First, how thankful I am to be here. I expressed that often when I first arrived, three years ago this coming March, but I don't think I've expressed it as much recently. At least, not enough—my sense of thanksgiving to God for arranging all the circumstances of bringing me here in

very real, along with my appreciation of your determination to call me despite all that was going on at the time. I am so very, very thankful.

The second thought I have is just how little Jesus' prayer seems to be answered. In John 17, he prays for what is good, to be sure, but it is a prayer for a situation that is not yet reality. But it should be. It can be. At times, perhaps it is, at least more so than at other times. But as a whole, Jesus' prayer remains a petition for that which is very good, but as of yet unaccomplished.

v.20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one."

Last week, if you remember, our focus was upon the apostles, Jesus' prayer for the apostles. Two weeks ago it was Jesus' prayer for himself. This whole chapter is sometimes titled *Jesus' high priestly prayer*. He prays first with respect to himself, then with regard for the disciples in particular. And then for all believers. Or, as I've entitled my sermon, Jesus prays for you, us. And my first observation is that what he prays for hasn't happened. Nonetheless, it is the goal. That which ought to be true, were it not for our sin. Namely,

I. THE UNITY OF BELIEVERS.

All believers. Again, the contrast this morning is with the specific focus we saw last week upon the disciples, or apostles. Jesus' prayer continues,

v.20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word."

So disciples are identified as believers. That's another title for Christians. Believers. Contrasted with unbelievers. That's how Jesus defines his disciples. That's the definition of a Christian. They are believers. Specifically, they believe in Jesus. And they believe in Jesus because they have read and believe the word of the apostles about Jesus. In other words, they believe the Bible is the word of God.

v.20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word."

Let me stop just a moment, right at this point, and emphasize this idea. And make it personal. Are you a believer? Do you believe in Jesus?

Jesus himself is very plain in his teaching.

Mark 16:15 "And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."

When the Apostle Paul was asked by the Philippian jailor, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?", his response, recorded in,

Acts 16:31 "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house."

We get even further description of this idea of believing in,

Rom. 10:8 "But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him

will not be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. 13 For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

So do you believe in Jesus? That is the ultimate question of life and death. Do you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead? If you do, you will be saved, for you are saved by believing. You are saved by faith, by what you believe, not by any measure of good works that you might perform.

Are you a believer? And if not, then I urge you to believe! In a sense, it really is that simple. Believe what God says in his word is true! Believe the Bible to be the word of God. Believe that Jesus is the son of God and the savior of sinners. Believe that God raised him from the dead. And you will be saved.

Now, what does Jesus pray for believers? He prays for their unity. That they would be one. And he makes an astounding comparison with respect to our unity.

A. Believers are called by God to reflect the unity of the trinity.

I've made a point of John's emphasis upon the trinity throughout our study of this book, and here is a direct application. There is unity in the Trinity. That is to say that there are three persons in the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But they are one God. They are one, in essence. What makes God, God, is shared equally among the three persons. One essence. One substance. One godhead. One God.

Never is that stated more clearly than in, John 10:27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and

they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. 30 I and My Father are one.”

So Jesus prays for the the believers to be one, verse 21, “as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You.” These are very simply words, being used to define a very profound doctrine. The Father is in the son. The son is in the Father. They are one in essence. And believers are also to be one with each other, in that same way.

We are to reflect the unity of the trinity.

The joke is often told of a Scottish Presbyterian who is rescued after many years on a desert island. As he stands on the deck of the rescuing vessel, the captain says to him, “I thought you were stranded alone. How come I can see three huts on the beach?”

“Well,” replies the castaway, “that one there is my house and that one there is where I go to church.”

“And the third one?” asks the skipper.

“Oh, that's my old church.”

Hits home, doesn't it? The church of our day isn't very good about reflecting the unity of the trinity! But that is what Jesus prays for. And in the widespread absence of that unity, let me stress the one essential thing that is necessary in order to achieve any measure of that unity at all, humility.

Eph. 4:1 “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the

bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

What is needed in us, for this prayer of Jesus' to be fulfilled? Lowliness. Gentleness. Longsuffering. Bearing with one another in love. So even in our local church, if we are going to experience any measure of this unity, then you need to put up with me. Long-suffering. And I need to put up with you, bearing with you in love. Humility.

Phil. 2:1 “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. 3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

Please keep this goal of unity in mind, and keep in mind how Jesus defines it as he prays, “that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You.”

Notice, then, one distinct purpose of this sort of unity.

B. Believers are called by God to bear witness to the unity of the trinity.

We are to bear witness to the triune God by demonstrating unity! Wow. It's no wonder the witness of the Christian church is so lacking in the world today. Our witness is supposed to be based upon our ability to live out together the relationship between the Father and the Son. And it is that unity that the world will see as a testimony of the presence of God.

v.21b

We see the same thing at the end of,
v.23

So...Jesus is saying that the world will know that he has been sent into the world by God the father to be the savior of the world, when the world sees the unity of believers. When the world sees that there is one body, one church, that believers are one, then they will be able to see that there is one God, that God the Father has sent his son to be the savior of the world.

We better pray with Jesus, because that's not what the world sees now, is it? And we better work hard to keep this goal before us, despite our own sinful tendencies to act in ways that deny the unity of believers.

People of God, the goal is that we endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." And the method is lowliness, gentleness and humility. That's what Jesus is praying for in John 17.

Notice then,

II. THE GLORY OF UNITY.

We're not talking just theoretical, or hypothetical. We're talking reality. This unity is to be our glory. For Jesus builds on his image of the trinity.

v.22-23

Now, really think about that. God the Father has given his glory to Jesus. And this is what we read in that context,

John 1:14 "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Jesus, in the flesh, manifested the fullness of the glory of God.

"We beheld His glory." And now in our text this morning Jesus says,

v.22

A. Believers have received the glory of God.

And nothing is more significant than that.

v.23a "I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one."

The glory which Jesus has as the son of God is the glory that he seeks to be reflected in us. And to the extent that we demonstrate the glory of that unity, we reflect the glory of God himself. Do you see just how important all of this is?

This is our identity. This is our calling. This is our glory. Because...

Eph. 4: 4 "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

But we are all too often concerned about ourselves. Our own interests. Our own glory, in ourselves. And we forget the call to humility, in which we actually see and define our glory in terms of our unity.

Dear friends, let me hold this ideal before you this morning, even as we recognize the impossibility of its perfect fulfillment here in this age, because of our sin as well as the sins of others. We can't get there, just by wishing it to be so, nor can we achieve this goal by our own will or determination. Because you can't change other people, and you can't make other people have unity with you.

But you can pursue it, through your own exercise of humility. And lowliness. And gentleness. Considering others more important than yourselves. And the motivation to do just that is the awareness that we have received the glory of God.

And very much related to that,

B. Believers have received the love of God.

Unity and love are closely connected.

v.23

When we live in unity, we show forth the reality that God has loved us, just as the Father has loved the Son. And when we live without that unity, when we as believers live such that it seems like we are devouring one another in our competition and proud resentments, well what does that teach the world about God?

John 13:34 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

One more point with regard to this prayer of Jesus. It is Jesus’ prayer for,

III. THE PRESENCE OF BELIEVERS WITH JESUS.

This is Jesus’ prayer,

v.24

Not just the blessing of the presence of Jesus, seeing Jesus, but that reality is that,

A. Believers are able to see Jesus’ glory.

So get your eyes off the things of this world.

Col. 3:1 “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

We fix our eyes on so many things of such lessor importance, don’t we? Money. Earthly beauty. Success. Pleasure. We think our glory lies in our appearance. Or our strength. Or as a church, our size. Now, beloved, our greatest glory is to see Jesus. Our greatest glory is to be in the presence of God, where we can behold his glory!

That is our goal for the future, to be sure. It is identified in the benediction of,

Jude 24 “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy...”

But that future hope ought to be our present hope as well. We are able to see Jesus’ glory, and that is what he prays for us. That we would see the glory of Jesus which the Father has given him.

That is, of course, why he was incarnate, and became a man.

John 1:14 “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

But I still need to ask, and keep this question before us, is that the glory you seek? Is that the glory that captures your attention, and your affection, the glory of Jesus? Or do you seek the glory found in the things of this world?

Col. 3:1 “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of

God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.”

Heb. 12:1 “...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.”

Don't be distracted. Don't be sidetracked. Don't be deceived. Nothing in this world has any glory that compares to the glory of Jesus. So that's the upon which you ought to gaze. The glory of Jesus, which the Father gave him, his own glory. And with that, his love. You see,

B. Believers are able to see the eternal love of God.

And that is what Jesus prays for.

v.24

It is an eternal love, isn't it? That the Father has loved the son from all eternity. And there we are, back in the doctrine of the trinity. And how does that affect you and your life today, here and now? Simply put, all of this should give you an awareness of God's eternal love, a love the Father has for the son. And, therefore, the awareness of the love the Father has for you. The awareness of an eternal love, a love that we have received.

v.25-26

So we should know, and feel, and experience the very same reality that the Lord spoke to Jeremiah,

Jer. 31:3 “The Lord has appeared of old to me, saying: “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.”

An everlasting love. If you understand that God loved his son

from eternity, then you should be able to understand and appreciate that he loved you the very same way!

Eph. 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”

And that's what Jesus prays for, our awareness of that eternal love of God.

Such a prayer. A prayer for unity. And a prayer for our awareness of God's love, a love that began in eternity and, therefore, never ends. It is the same love with which the Father has loved the son.