



SERMON TITLE: May They All Be One

DATE: January 24, 2021

SCRIPTURE: John 17:20-23

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## SERIES SUMMARY

"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

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With the inauguration of our new President, there's a lot of talk about unity." President Biden put it this way, "Without unity, there is no peace, only bitterness, and fury; no progress, only exhausting outrage; no nation, only a state of chaos." He said, "This is our historic moment of crisis and challenge, and *unity is the path forward*. We must meet this moment as the *United States of America*." That phrase, "unity is the path forward," is true. Still, the only way unity will be possible in our deeply divided nation is if our unity rests on a higher value than expecting everyone to see eye-to-eye on everything. And, unity will only be possible if we do not demonize those who disagree with us. But even worse than the division in our country is the division that has come to churches across our country. For many Christians, their personal politics and their hope that *this* personality or *that* personality can "save" us has made it almost impossible for them to see those who disagree with them as even being true "Christians." If our unity is not anchored in the Gospel, then there's no hope for the church. *The church has no voice if we have no unity. The church has no validity apart from unity. The church has no vitality without unity. The church has no mission apart from unity.* So, how can the church attain the unity for which Jesus prays with the current political climate being what it is? Well, interestingly enough, the division in the church created by our current political climate intersects directly with something Jesus taught, *or better, something Jesus modeled for us*. In fact, the only time that the word "unity" appears in the Gospels is when Jesus is doing this one essential activity. So, what is that essential activity? It's *prayer*.

Here's the "big idea" for this message—"Prayer is the pathway to unity." So, hold that thought, first, we'll walk through the passage, and then we'll come back to the "big idea" at the end of the message.

Read John 17:20-23 —In v20, Jesus is clearly praying for us. We are the "ones who will believe" in Jesus through the message of the apostles. Again, the point is, Jesus is praying for you and me and FG. And, in these verses, Jesus is specifically praying for what he most wants for us. Here's what he wanted to protect more than anything else as we carry his mission forward in a hostile world—*that they all may be one*. Unity ties our holiness and our mission together. Unity is something that must be protected at all costs. And that's what we're going to look at this morning—our unity. The question is, What kind of unity is Jesus talking about here? A common thread runs through vv11, 17, 20-22, 22, 23, and that is, there is a direct connection between the unity of the church and the truth of who Jesus is. Here's my first point—Our unity rests in the Gospel of Jesus Christ—the Gospel message preached by the apostle and passed down to us through their preaching and what we now have recorded for us in the New Testament.

Now, do you know why Jesus prayed for oneness—for our unity? Jesus prays to his Father in Heaven, "The reason I want them to be one is so when the world—*not the people in the church, but the people outside the church*—so that when they see unity in diversity in my church, the world will come to the conclusion that you have sent me." Jesus is telling us that unity isn't an add-on. No, unity is mission-critical. He's saying, "Unity is the pathway forward." Here's my second point—Our unity results in the world being able to see who Jesus really is." And that means we must never allow anything or anyone to divide us because, according to Jesus, there's way too much at stake. It was the teaching of Jesus—not our political parties—that laid the groundwork for our modern sense of justice and fairness and the dignity of every single individual, no matter who they are or where they came from.

It's true, we haven't gotten that right all the time, and we continue to get it wrong sometimes, but our hope is not in a perfect political party. No, our hope is in the message and the mission of Jesus in this world to do something no political party can do, and that is, make old hearts new. That's what a unified church is all about. *So, why in the world would we allow ourselves to be divided over lesser things?*

Let's pray as Jesus prayed here. Remember our "big idea?" "Prayer is the pathway for unity." Here's a prayer I picked up from Andy Stanley that is simple yet profound—"Heavenly Father, make us one, so we can influence many." Make us one, so we can influence many. Make me one with brothers and sisters in Christ with whom I disagree politically so that we can influence many. Bring Fellowship Greenville to "complete unity" around the Gospel—make us one so we can influence many. I challenge you to pray this prayer every day and throughout each day in this coming week. Think, what would FG be like, if we became an answer to this great prayer Jesus prayed for us?

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Discussion Starters — This week, we continue our "mini-series" on the Lord's Prayer found in John 17.

1. Have someone review the context and background of John 17. What came before and what will come after this prayer?
2. What makes this prayer so important?
3. Now have someone read vv 20-23.
4. In these verses, Jesus is praying for those who will become his followers long after his disciples—he's praying for us! What specific things does Jesus pray for us?
5. What sort of things do you pray for regularly, and how do those things compare with what Jesus is praying for here?
6. What is Jesus' primary focus in this part of his prayer? (unity)
7. Based on your own experience, what do you think are some of the biggest hindrances to unity in the church?
8. Why do you think the deep-seated political division in our country today has so easily infiltrated the church?
9. What does our unity rest on?
10. What does our unity result in?
11. What does it mean to you to know that, on the night before he was crucified, Jesus prayed for you and our church?
12. Name one specific way that Jesus' example of prayer here might shape your approach to prayer differently.
13. What one thing do you think God might be saying to you from Jesus' prayer here in Jn17?
14. Close your meeting by praying Andy Stanley's prayer—"Heavenly Father, make us one, so we can influence the many?" Then, build on that simple prayer by asking the Father to bring Fellowship Greenville to complete unity around the Gospel of Jesus.