

“Jesus Prays for Us”  
John 17:20-26  
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In this study we will be looking at the High Priestly prayer of Jesus from John 17. This is a three-part prayer where Jesus prays first for Himself in a sense, then prays for His disciples and lastly beginning in John 17:20 He prays for the church – for you and me. Hear what He prays for us in John 17:20-26 which says, [20] *“I do not ask for these only (referring to His Disciples), but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, [21] that they may all 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. [22] The glory that You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one even as We are one, [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 loved them even as You loved Me. [24] 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. [25] O righteous Father, even though the world does not know You, I know You, and these know that You have sent Me. [26] 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.”* May the Spirit bless the reading of God’s Word to our hearts and use it for His glory.

I realize I’m not quite the youngster I used to be as my wife and I are approaching 70. It’s surprising to us that the time has passed so quickly. I am approaching retirement and have so appreciated working with my dear friend Pastor Reeder who have known for almost 46 years. I thank God so much for being able to work with Bruce Stallings and his incredibly talented abilities. Briarwood is very blessed. Benny Youngblood, the pastor I report to has been such a great asset. People have asked me how I do pastoral care in a church so big and it’s because of the wonderful shepherding structure that has been put in place. This involves the communities that minister together, the pastoral redundancy that occurs when people are active in Sunday school classes, the lay pastors, the Grace House ladies that are apart of my team and it’s been remarkable to see how God uses all these people to help minister in this church.

There are some ministry things that I will still be doing as I leave this position plus we will spend more time with our children and grandchildren who don’t live in town. We have discovered with grandchildren that they don’t wait on you to come visit so you better get your foot on the road if you want to keep up with them. So, now let’s focus on the text for this study that is a powerful prayer of Jesus.

The time of this prayer is roughly the Spring of 30 A.D. where Jesus is finishing His three-year ministry and His earthly ministry is drawing to a close. By some count, we find that Jesus has done 34 recorded miracles in the New Testament, given 38 to 40 parables, been involved with countless confrontations with others, given several eloquent discourses including the Sermon on the Mount, the Last Supper and now He is at the end of His ministry, looking back at packed, powerful, popular and passionate ministry and He comes to pray in John 17. It is the longest prayer in the New Testament and some call it the Priestly prayer because it seems to be patterned after the prayer of the High Priest as it was given annually on the Day of Atonement. I prefer to call it just the Lord’s Prayer, with all due respect to Matthew 6 and 7, because it’s indeed where we see His heart at the very end of His ministry.

You can learn a lot about somebody by listening to them pray. There was a man in our church who I used to visit in the hospital and he has gone to be with the Lord now. My impression of him was that he was kind of a cantankerous guy and seemed to be a little contrary. He seemed to be a little crusty and negative but then again, he was in the hospital. Once when I was finishing a visit with him, I said ‘Let me pray with you before I go’ and he said ‘No Mark, let me pray for you.’ I let him and he uncorked one of the most sweetest, compassionate conversational prayer with Jesus that I think I have ever heard. I just about fell out of my chair. It wasn’t what I was expecting and I was impressed. Frankly, I was humbled that I had rushed to judgment about him. He prayed for me, my wife, my children and the rest of my family. I went away that day thinking ‘he has talked to God before for you can tell he is used to this.’ I learned a lot about my friend that day.

When we look at this prayer of Jesus, we can learn a lot about our Savior. First, I’d like to take a look at those first two sections of His prayer with the first being essential about Himself. It is pretty amazing stuff for Someone who is about to face humiliation, torture, crucifixion and worse. Yet we never see any doom or gloom. If anything, we see confidence in God’s love. He addresses His heavenly Father as Father. He knows it’s His Father He shares the Trinity with and He knows His Father’s compassion, love and calling He has on His life, by the will of the Father. The term Father is of absolute trust and affection, because He is confident in God’s love.

John 17:1-5 says [1] *When Jesus had spoken these words, He lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You, [2] since You have given Him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom You have given Him. [3] And this is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. [4] I glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work that You gave Me to do. [5] And now, Father, glorify Me in Your own presence with the glory that I had with You before the world existed.”*

He is also confident in God’s plan for He said ‘the hour has come.’ By that He doesn’t mean literal time on His clock has come – not the hour of the day or it may be somewhat implied. He is talking about a lot bigger picture for this is the climax of human history – when He goes to the cross. The Son is ready to purchase a people for His heavenly Father. The Son is prepared to leave the earth and then to send His Holy Spirit to minister and live within the church. The Son will establish His body on the earth, that is the church of Jesus Christ – it’s you and me He will establish with this. No other event in human history – like war, natural disaster, political change, technological innovation – even comes close to what is unfolding in these pages of the Bible.

It’s not only the climax of human history but it’s the climax of Divine history. The Godhead will be divided for the first time when Jesus cries out ‘My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?’ The Prophet Son who brought God’s Word will reveal Himself in a role as Priest as He takes the punishment for the sins of His people and in His resurrection, He lives to intercede for His people like a Priest. He will also display His character as a King as He will defeat Satan, conquer death and establish His rule forever and ever. This is a wonderful picture of God’s love as He sees God’s plan.

He also sees this as His ability to do what God wants as He prays ‘Glorify Your Son that I may glorify You.’ Jesus was passionate for the glory of God. He knows His identity as the Son of God. He yearns for the veil to be removed so that the truth of Hebrews 1 can be made manifest. Hebrews 1:3 says [3] *He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of*

*His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Jesus brings glory to God by doing exactly what God wanted Him to do and He is obsessed with the glory of God. He brings God glory and will bring Himself glory.*

I don't mean this disrespectfully but John 17:1-5 is basically saying to God 'God, let's get ready to rumble. Let's change the course of human history and the course of Divine history as I go to the cross.' Jesus did this willingly and confidently.

Secondly, we see His prayer for the Disciples in John 17:6-19 which says [6] *"I have manifested Your name to the people whom You gave Me out of the world. Yours they were, and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. [7] Now they know that everything that You have given Me is from You. [8] For I have given them the words that You gave Me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from You; and they have believed that You sent me. [9] I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. [10] All Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. [11] And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, which You have given Me, that they may be one, even as We are one. [12] While I was with them, I kept them in Your name, which You have given Me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. [13] But now I am coming to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. [14] I have given them Your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. [15] I do not ask that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one. [16] They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. [17] Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. [18] As You sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. [19] And for their sake I consecrate Myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth."*

Those that the Father has given to Jesus are referring to the 12, the Apostles and a couple of things can be said about these Apostles. One, is that humanly speaking they were totally unqualified to do what they are about to do to lead the church. Few would have considered the last few years of training even successful at all. These Disciples lacked significantly spiritual understanding again and again and again. They lacked humility for they were always concerned about who was going to be the greatest in the Kingdom of God. They displayed an overt lack of faith – whether it was in a storm, on the sea of Galilee, the feeding of the 5,000 and the 4,000, etc. They demonstrated a lack of commitment – snoozing in the Garden of Gethsemane as Jesus is sweating great drops of blood. They lacked power for sometimes they couldn't heal. They were often intimidated by their surroundings. In my opinion, these Disciples were totally unqualified to lead and yet Jesus is completely and utterly confident of their future.

If I was in Jesus' shoes, I probably would have thought I chose the wrong ones to be my Disciples. I thought they might show some maturity and progress along the way. They did but not like we might think they should have. Yet we see no complaints and just assurance and confidence that God knows what He is doing. We see Jesus pray that they know God in John 17:6-8, that they be protected from the evil one in John 17:15 and that they know His joy in John 17:13. That prayer of Jesus was going to be answered just a few weeks from the time He prayed it, but in a way we wouldn't have thought it would.

After Jesus ascended, Pentecost came and the church began, immediately these same losers (Disciples), now filled with the Holy Spirit begin preaching, and preaching and preaching.

They were called before the Sanhedrin who told them to stop preaching and they were continued to be called back to the Sanhedrin and on the second visit they were told to stop preaching ‘in the name of Jesus.’ Gamaliel a Pharisee intervened for the Disciples so they wouldn’t be killed but in Acts 5:40 it says *[40] and when they had called in the Apostles, they beat them (flogged) and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.* Flogging was a terrible punishment. It wasn’t just a beating but it was a tearing up of your back and in some cases, flogging would actually kill people.

Then it goes onto say in Acts 5:41-42, *[41] Then they (Apostles) left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. [42] And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.* Jesus prayed they would know the joy – His joy – and God answered that prayer, but not in a way I would have anticipated. Jesus knew His Disciples would be successful and that they would turn the world upside down because He knew His heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit intimately.

Now, we’re going to look at the third part of this prayer of Jesus in John 17 where He part of this section He is praying for the church. It is an astonishing truth to realize that Jesus was praying for us in this prayer. This is why this passage is so important for us to meditate on. Here the Son of God, Creator of the universe is at the conclusion of His ministry as He puts His thoughts together in this prayer, praying for you and me. Jesus knows that people will believe in Him through His Disciples. This is clearly a fore-ordination as God is calling people to Himself. See, Jesus didn’t die just for the potential that someone might come to Christ, no, He purchased a people for God.

In fact, that is the truth in Revelation 5 where John records the words of the four living creatures in heaven and the 24 elders when they sing this in Revelation 5:9-10; *[9] And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, [10] and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”* Now, in this moment of John 17, Jesus is taking time to pray for His purchase, the people who will believe down through the centuries through the message of the Apostles. When I order things on Amazon I pray for things all the time that the Lord would get here safely. Jesus wasn’t just praying that the Disciples would make it home safely, for He was praying for a lot more and more profoundly here.

Here is what my summary is of what Jesus is praying and what He wants most. Jesus prays for a oneness in the church so rooted in the fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that the world will see that the Father has sent Jesus and will be drawn to Him. Jesus considers the church, not necessarily individuals, as the primary evangelist outreach in our culture that people will be brought to the church, attracted to the church and there they will learn the Gospel. Obviously, individuals are involved in that, but the oneness that comes to the church is what attracts people to the church, body of Christ and that’s God’s intention.

This oneness He is speaking about here begins not with us, but with God – the Trinity – because in the Trinity you have a dramatic diversity. The Father is unlike the Son. The Son is unlike the Spirit and it’s precisely that diversity when it comes together in oneness that works out in our salvation so that we can know the Lord Jesus Christ. Biblical oneness speaks after the pattern of the personal mutual indwelling of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That’s where it starts.

Sinclair Ferguson, a wonderful theologian, said this; Just as the Father and Son live together in the fellowship of the Spirit, so since every believer is indwelt by that same Spirit, our fellowship begins to mirror theirs, for it's a supernatural thing. In other words, the Spirit supernaturally indwells each believer and begins to create a unity that is unlike anything in this world. It's unlike any club, sports team, military unit or family. It's a kind of unity in the midst of diversity that is extremely attractive.

Paul describes the church in this way from Colossians 3:11; *[11] Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.* Paul wrote that because all those distinctions were there and his point was that Christ had created a unique fellowship that absolutely transcends all natural, social distinctions and divisions. When Christ dwells in us by His Spirit a bond of fellowship is formed and love is created that you don't find anywhere else in this world. Paul is showing us that this oneness is not uniformity.

People find uniformity a couple of ways. Church people do. One is by watering down or ignoring the truth of Scripture. Some will say doctrine is bad because it divides and that's not the case. So, they end up reducing Christianity down to some kind of bland moralisms that eventually denies the Gospel or the need for the Gospel and denies the teaching of such things as the atonement of Christ, heaven, hell, miracles and other things. Then the Gospel is lost, but on the other extreme there are those who seek uniformity by seeking to be isolated from or separated from anyone is different from they are. They even demand strict conformity in matters of style, personal or even political preference of those who wish to join the church. Then what happens is, the church gets smaller and smaller and smaller, isolated and ignored by the world. Some seek uniformity and unity without the doctrine of Scripture and some seek unity by getting rid of everyone who is not like them.

You might think you're not on either of those extremes but it's a challenge for all of us. If you reflect on your own life you begin to see how we see unity in terms of our uniformity. For instance, when someone first becomes a Christian and is excited about their faith, they desire to love and seek fellowship with everyone inside and outside of the church. They know the joy of the Lord and they want to share it with everyone. Gradually as time passes it shrinks down to where they show love and fellowship to all their acquaintances inside and outside the church. Even that begins to shrink to fellowship with just those inside the church and then it shrinks to with only those who are like them inside the church. Finally, it's just with those who like them inside the church. As we get older as Christians, we find we get isolated with just those who are friends, who are same age, with same convictions and we end up calling that unity because it's uniformity but that's not what Jesus is talking about.

Jesus is talking about oneness that is not a uniformity. This oneness is built on intimacy with God and starts with the Trinity itself. John 17:21 says *[21] that they may all 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.* Us is intimate fellowship with the Trinity itself. It began when Jesus purchased us on the cross paying for the penalty of our sin and we embraced Him as Lord and Savior. Then God takes His righteousness and lays it upon us. We are forgiven and innocent in God's sight because of the work of Christ. It's a supernatural work of the Gospel in the heart of each one of us, but the supernatural work continues as God is forming His body (His church) made up of members like you and me. People begin to see Jesus in us – His character, His forgiveness, His identity – increasingly manifested.

One of Paul's great themes is union with Christ. Paul says repeatedly 'we are in Christ' and that is a supernatural position both in our standing and in our daily experience. II Corinthians 5:17 says [17] *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* It cannot get more radical than that. When a group of those radicalized people are brought together then there is a unique body. People begin to see Jesus in us and God's love between us. This is a miraculous characteristic of Christian fellowship. Jesus said in John 13:34-35, [34] *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.* [35] *By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*

When Paul talked about grieving the Holy Spirit, it is interesting to note what kind of sins grieve the Holy Spirit. Paul says in Ephesians 4:29, [29] ***Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.*** I used to know a preacher that was really irritating when I was a youth director in a church. Whenever I would say to him 'I probably shouldn't say this...' He'd say 'Then don't.' And that was so irritating to me. He would tell me that if it's going to divide or tear people apart or criticize unduly then just keep your mouth shut, which is really what he meant when he said 'then don't.'

Paul goes onto say in Ephesians 4:30-32, [30] *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* [31] *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.* [32] *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

This is an intimacy that Jesus longs to enjoy in us now and in eternity. In fact, in His prayer He talks about how anxious He is to bring us home. In the past two days I have done two funerals of members of our church who were very active in this congregation for many, many years. They have now gone to be with Jesus. Jesus says in John 17:24 [24] ***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.*** He is not satisfied with our present standing until we are truly individually with Him. For us there will be no greater thrill than to stand before Jesus with family, friends and the whole church gathered together to be with Him with all His glory restored. We shouldn't be able to wait.

I want to give you three takeaways about this oneness that Jesus is praying for in us. It's really the only thing He is praying about in this finally section of His Priestly prayer – the Lord's prayer. The first takeaway is Biblical oneness anticipates diversity. We should never be surprised by what the Lord does. It's like the diversity of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – which all had to be apart of the process of delivering God's Word to us, providing a penalty for our sin and strengthening us to serve. Clearly, God made us to be different in the church and likes us to be different in the church. He made us male and female and that's a big difference but He has also given us a variety of spiritual gifts, many different perspectives, plus natural talents and abilities. He has given us different views on liberty and different styles of worship. The variety is endless that He intends us to have in the church of Jesus Christ.

Once we had a dog that we named snowflake. I was skeptical at first but I fell in love with little snowflake. She was a great little asset to our house but only for about three or four years, because snowflake had a number of physical problems. Though she loved us she eventually died suddenly at the Vet of pancreatitis and it was really tragic for our family because we loved that dog. I asked the Vet who was a dear friend, 'Do you tend to have a problem with pure breeds?' He said 'I make a living off of pure bred dogs. It's the Heinz 57 type that are so

strong and seem to withstand anything, they'll live forever.' I kind of think that's true with the church. Pure bred churches don't do well for they tend to break apart, but it's the Heinz 57 mixture that God has gathered together in our midst that He wants to see and see celebrated so none of us should be surprised that there are differing views within the church. God just smiles and says 'that's just the way I designed it.'

The second takeaway is Biblical oneness desires presence. It starts with Christ's presence with His heavenly Father and the Spirit. Christ came away from that fellowship to the earth in an unnatural way, a life changing way, a Divine changing way and His presence was lost with the Father at least intimately and finally He was united back in the Trinity and it's that presence that is so important which should describe the oneness we share with each other. The church is not a Zoom fellowship no matter how efficient that may be. God intends us to interact personally, regularly and enthusiastically as we rub together.

A few weeks ago, our daughter-in-law Tracy went to Poland. Our youngest daughter and her husband are missionaries in Western Ukraine and due to the war, they have had to go to Poland to work with displaced people. It's a busy time for our daughter with a 7, 5, 3 and 1 year old in a land they don't know the language but they are doing very well. Our daughter and Tracy were cheerleaders in high school and Tracy was enthusiastic about spending time with Anna and the family. After a week she left and was sitting in the airport in Poland getting ready to fly to Amsterdam to fly then to Atlanta, Georgia. In the airport she observed two women and three little children, age 3, 4, and 9. The two women were well dressed but looked kind of scattered and blown away, very tired looking.

Tracy went over to chat with them and found out they had fled Kiev, Ukraine six weeks earlier and had been on the road. They had to leave their husbands behind to fight in the war and they had finally made it across the boarder as they were going to fly to Dublin, Ireland to meet up with some other Ukrainian wives and children for about six months before they would have to decide what to do next. Tracy had compassion for the kids due to the fact they were all cuddled around an old single stuffed toy. She suddenly remembered she had two stuffed toys in her luggage for her two children. She thought her children had plenty so she pulled them out and gave them to the children and they were so excited about the fact each now had a special stuffed animal. The mothers of the children expressed their appreciate and Tracy left to get on her plane. When she got on the plane the mothers and children got on right beside her and the 9-year-old sat right beside Tracy. Tracy sent a picture because as the plane was getting ready to take off she motioned for the boy to come close and she pulled him in and fell sound asleep. She said that little boy slept like a rock all the way to Amsterdam.

When they got to Amsterdam, the little boy asked his mother if Tracy was coming to Dublin with them and it was then I realized that affection didn't come just because of the toy but it came because of her presence in his life. This was a little boy desperate for some stability, someone that loves him, hope and a future and was blessed by this lady. I believe Tracy was more blessed just to be able to come alongside and let him sleep on her shoulder. That's the kind of presence that you and I need. It's so easy to come in and say a brief hello and leave but we need that kind of compassionate presence because the world doesn't have it. It's alien to most of your family and friends who don't know Christ but God uses that to be one of the most essential parts of our fellowship that is so attractive to a lost world.

He intends the church to be a supernatural agent of evangelism as He brings lost and lonely people to Himself through our fellowship. May that oneness be a passion for us. Hebrews 10:24-25 says [24] *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good*

*works, [25] not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* The real point is that we need to come together as a church, not because the church needs it, but because we need it. We need to be here interacting with people who are a little different than us and may be a little strange to us, but can be a source of great fellowship.

Because I preach a lot of funerals, it's interesting how often I will ask someone 'how did you know the deceased' and you would probably be amazed at how often they'd say 'well, I didn't until we started sitting next to them at church and we have sat next to them in church for 20 years and have become dear friends.' They show up mourning along with the family at the funeral because that's what Christian fellowship is all about. According to Hebrews we are to encourage all the more as we see the Day approaching.

Thirdly, Biblical oneness is essential for us. It's not an option and what's more it's a really big deal for Jesus. II Corinthians 5:10 says *[10] For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.* Christians know this time is coming and we know it will not be a judgment of salvation but it will be a critiquing and evaluating of Jesus looking at us yet we don't know exactly what that will look like, but I wonder if oneness among believers is such a big deal to Jesus that it's basically the only thing He prays for us. Think of all the other things He could have prayed – for our prosperity, our health, our impact in the world, etc. Yet He prays that we would be one with the other. I wonder when we meet with Him at the Judgement if oneness will not be a topic of conversation as a mark we had or if we forgave other willingly in the church or did you walk with others in the church through times of difficulty or did you rejoice with their joys or did you compromise when you had differences and difficulties?

Since oneness was such a big deal for Jesus, I'm convinced it will be a huge topic of conversation when the Day is drawing near, as Hebrews says. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, I thank You so much that Your Holy Spirit is in us and we alone are so easily distracted, can become so selfish, but we alone need Your forgiving grace so that we might extend that forgiveness to others. We alone need Your love and compassion so we can extend that love and compassion to others. We alone need Your patience with one another especially with people who aren't like me so that the glory of You might be seen in our church that people might come and be overwhelmed by the uniqueness of this body that they will come to You. Lord, I pray that You will continue to minister in and through us for Your glory and we ask these prayers in Jesus' Name, Amen.