

My Prayer For You **John 17:20-26**

We have reached the last sermon in our Upper Room series and the passage we are going to look at today is a prayer that Jesus prayed for you and me. I'm hoping that all of you have had the blessing of having someone pray for you in person. There's something powerful when someone prays for you and asks for the Lord's blessings over you.

One of the most powerful prayers that someone prayed over me was a written prayer that my Mom put together and was praying for me while I was in college. I didn't know about the prayer, but I was home on Christmas break after a really difficult fall semester where I was struggling with depression and she asked me how I was doing. After telling her, she grabbed that prayer and showed it to me. To my amazement, I could see how God had been answering her prayers over the past several months. As I read it, God revealed what he had been doing in my life and why I was struggling, and he set me free from depression right then and there and changed my life. It was a powerful prayer and there have been other powerful prayers people have prayed over me since then.

Today we get to look at a powerful prayer that Jesus prayed for all of us while he was in the Upper Room. I want us to see what he prayed for and how God answered, and I trust it will be a blessing for all of us.

John 17:20-23

"I do not ask for these only, 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.

In this final part of Jesus' prayer in John 17 he is praying for those who would believe in him through the word of his disciples – through their preaching, teaching and writings. And since their preaching, teaching, and writings make

up the NT and the foundation of all Christian doctrine, everyone who comes to faith in Christ is ultimately doing so through the word of the disciples. So this is a prayer for all of us who have come to faith in Christ! He's praying for you and me!

Jesus makes two requests and the first is in these verses. I'm going to spend almost all of our time in these verses because they're actually very difficult to understand. He asks the Father that we would all be one. He even goes so far as to say in verse 23 that his desire is that we would become "perfectly one" so the world would know the Father sent him and loved us as he loved Jesus.

This is a wonderful prayer! And yet, if you're like me, it brings up some questions and confusion. It sounds like Jesus is praying for the unity of the church – for perfect harmony and fellowship among all believers. And it sounds like he prays for that because that kind of unity would be a powerful witness to the world of who he is and of God's love for his people. That's what I've assumed about this prayer and many of you probably have as well.

But if that's what Jesus is praying for, the Father has definitely not answered it! It's easy to see that Christians are a very divided group of people! There are all kinds of disagreements, fighting, and division. And it isn't just a recent thing; it started way back in the New Testament with some of the first churches that were planted. And the effect that's had on the world hasn't been a powerful witness! In fact, the division between Christians is one of the excuses unbelievers use for why they don't believe.

So if perfect harmony and fellowship is what Jesus prayed for here, his prayer wasn't answered. And if his prayer wasn't answered, then the promise he made to his disciples earlier that evening: "whatever they asked for in his name they would receive," that would be a lie because he didn't even receive what he asked for!

This has always bothered me and I wanted to explore the possibility that maybe Jesus was asking for something else. And after digging into it and looking at the rest of the things Jesus says in this prayer, I could see that's what he's doing. So I want to walk you through this, but I'll warn you that this

is going to get deep and complicated, but that's the only way we can unlock and actually understand how Jesus was praying for us that night.

So he prays "that they may all be one," but then he says, "just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us." So that's his description of the oneness he's asking for. He says something similar in Vs. 23: "I in them and you in me." You see the repeated phrase: in me, in you, in us, in them, in me. So you can see it isn't about agreement and harmony between every believer, it's about being "in" something – being joined together in Christ and in the Father. As the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father, Jesus is praying that all believers will also be in them, and that's the kind of oneness he has in mind. It's about our position in Christ.

A good example of this kind of oneness is marriage. In Genesis 2:24 we read: "*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*" Our whole understanding of marriage is that God makes two become one. So if I'm doing a wedding and I pray that God would make the husband and wife one, and they go through with their vows and are pronounced "husband and wife," did God answer that prayer? Absolutely. God united them together and they are one. He is in her and she is in him.

But what if later on, that husband and wife start setting up their new apartment and get into an argument, and they disagree about where to put the coffee maker? And they start fighting and get upset, and yelling, and one of them even ends up sleeping on the couch? There's disagreement and division... are they still one? Yes! Their division and disagreement doesn't put an end to their oneness. They don't agree, but they're still one. It's about position, not agreement.

And the same is true for what Jesus was praying for. Christians have all kinds of disagreements and division, but that doesn't mean God didn't answer Jesus' prayer. We're still one in the way that Jesus prayed for because we are united together in the Father and in the Son. We all belong to the same body with Christ as our head. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13: "*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.*"¹³ *For in one Spirit we were all baptized*

into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” (cf. Eph. 4:4-6)

That’s the kind of oneness Jesus was praying for and God answered that prayer. He answers that prayer every time a new person hears the teachings of the disciples and puts their faith in Christ. God unites us to himself and baptizes us into his body, which is the universal Church, and we become one with every believer that has ever lived. We are one in Christ. You and I are united together in Christ, even if we argue about something and I decide to start a new church.

This oneness is a huge blessing for us to rejoice in – we are united with the Father, united with the Son, united with each other – perfectly one in Christ. We need to learn to live that way, but praise God that when we struggle, it doesn’t take that oneness away.

Now there is something else Jesus said in his prayer that can help us understand how we are one, and that’s 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 Jesus gives us a “glory” that the Father had given to him, and because of that glory in us we become one in the same way the Father and Son are one. So what is that glory that Jesus has given us?

I read some explanations, and I think he’s talking about the glory written about in Hebrews 1:3 which says: “*He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.*” That’s talking about the glory Jesus had been given from the Father, which was the perfect image of God abiding in him and radiating from him. John 1:14 says, “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*” So the Father gave him that glory, and Jesus says he gives that same glory to every believer, which is what makes us one. What does that look like?

We know that when we put our faith in Christ, there is a huge spiritual transaction that takes place. Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:17 that we are a “new creation in Christ – the old has gone, the new has come.” We are given a new heart and a new mind. The Holy Spirit of God actually comes to dwell in our

hearts. And that is the glory that makes us all one. We are all hard-wired with the same spiritual DNA. In 1 John 3:9, John likens it to God's seed that is planted in us. It's the same seed in all of us. That seed will begin to grow and even though it germinates at different times and grows at different rates, it will gradually become the same "plant" in all of us, which is the glory, or the image of God. And that makes us one. We are all becoming a field of the same variety.

Paul writes about this in 2 Cor. 3:18: *"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."* So Jesus has given us the glory of the Father and we are being transformed into that same glory by the Spirit, from one degree to the next, and because of that, we are one. So this is the oneness that Jesus was praying for and God has been answering that prayer ever since that time. He unites us to himself and makes us a new creation, conforming all of us into the image of his Son.

And now I want us to think about the effect that kind of oneness has on "the world" because as Jesus was praying for this oneness, there was an effect he expected it would have. In verse 21 he asked that we would all be one "so that the world may believe that the Father had sent him." And then again, in verse 23 he says, "so that the world may know that you sent me and (that you) love them (Christians) even as you loved me."

In order to understand what Jesus had in mind, we have to look at it from his perspective. We've seen in previous weeks that when Jesus was talking about "the world" in the Upper Room, he was primarily talking about the unbelieving Jewish community. These were Jews that rejected him as Messiah and wanted to kill him and destroy everything he was doing. They did not believe the Father had sent him and they did not believe the Father loved his followers. In fact, they believed the opposite. How would any of them ever get to the point where they changed their mind and actually believed the Father sent Jesus and loved his disciples?

What Jesus said in this prayer is that they would believe if his future followers were all one. How would it have that kind of effect on unbelieving Jews? I

don't think it would if all of Jesus' future followers were only Jews. But what if it included those nasty Gentiles? You have to remember that Jews and Gentiles despised each other. They hated each other. They were completely divided and would never come together for anything. The only way that would happen is if it was an act of God.

Well the people Jesus was praying for in this prayer were not just going to be Jews, but also Gentiles! It would be Jews and Gentiles who would become one Church and one body – united together in the Father and the Son. It would be Jews and Gentiles who would be given the glory of the Father and receive the seed of the Spirit that would transform their lives into the image of the Son.

Eph. 2:11-16 says, "Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility."

In the book of Acts you read about the initial spread of Christianity and that the transforming power of the Holy Spirit was given, not only to Jews, but to Gentiles as well. You also read about how the Jewish Christians came to see and believe and accept the reality that the same spirit given to them was given to Gentile believers as well – and the Jew-Gentile Church of Jesus Christ came into being.

And when that happened, Jesus knew it would turn heads in the unbelieving Jewish community and show them that the Father actually did send him – Jesus actually was the Messiah – and the Father actually loved those who belonged to him because they belonged to the Father as well. (Eph. 3:6-10)

So it takes a lot of work to understand what Jesus was praying for, but now that we do, I hope we can deeply appreciate it and be blessed by it. We see Jesus' desire for us to be united together in him – to be one with he and the Father, and one with all the saints so that we would reveal the glory of God to an unbelieving world. He wanted us to have abiding fellowship with him and with one another. He wanted us to receive the Father's glory, which is the new life we have in him.

And I don't have time to preach through the second part of his prayer for us, but I want to read it because it shows us even more of what he wanted for us and prayed for us that evening.

Read John 17:24-26.

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.”

Jesus loves us and wants to bless us. He wants us to be with him in heaven so we can see his glory. And he's wanted these blessings for us ever since he prayed them in the Upper Room. Let's rejoice in him and enjoy all he's done for us and how the Father has blessed us as we worship him together with one voice.