

Jesus' Prayer for Us

We have seen in previous studies how special John 13-17 is for all of Jesus' disciples. Here is where He shares His heart with His closest friends and followers. Particularly in John 17 do we see His deepest concerns. In verses 1-5 He prays for Himself, that He might return to the Father with glory; in verses 6-19 He prays for the 11 disciples, that they might be preserved from the evil one and that they might be sanctified and that they might be won; and now in verses 20-26 Jesus prays for those who will believe the apostles' witness in years to come. In these verses He actually prays for us!

“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. **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.”

In this third section of the Lord's great prayer, we see that He prays for us (vv. 20-23) and He prays about us (vv. 24-26).

I. **Jesus prays for our unity with one another (vv. 20-23)**

It is truly amazing that under such great stress our Lord prays for others, those He dearly loves. And we can't help but notice the main prayer request on His heart: that we would be one with Him and with each other. Evangelical Protestants often underestimate the virtue of Church unity, because our heritage is one of “protesting” against the unorthodox doctrines of those in Church authority; but we can see how important this virtue is to the Lord Jesus. Likewise, in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we see in 4:1-3 that his top ethical priority for the Ephesians was that they “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” This sometimes surprises us knowing that there are so many ethical challenges in our day and in the first century, but our unity with one another grows out of our unity with God Himself.

In verses 21-23 Jesus shows us the very nature of this unity. He uses the words “just as” and “even as” three times in these verses, signifying that our unity with one another is “just as” His unity with us and His unity with the Father. This is an extraordinary unity indeed. It is not a unity that we can create or devise, but rather one given to us by God; therefore, our duty is not to create Church unity, but to protect and promote that unity. This ministry of promoting and protecting the unity of the Church requires great humility and patience and long-suffering (see Ephesians 4:2). There are many challenges to the unity of the Church, because the evil one would love for us to be distracted with internal squabbles and reconciled differences rather than ministering to the world. This is why Jesus explains the main effect of our unity: “so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” He repeats a similar statement in verse 23. Our witness to the world depends upon our love and unity with each other.

II. **Jesus prays about our unity with Him (vv. 24-26)**

Jesus not only prays for us, He prays about us to the Father in two ways.

A. That we would see His glory (v. 24)

He says in verse 24 that “I desire that they also...” This word “desire” can also be translated

“will.” Jesus is saying to the Father that He wills that we would be with Him to see His glory. Jesus knows that His disciples have seen His weakness in many ways: He has been scorned, derided, beaten, crucified, buried in a borrowed grave. Jesus longs for us to have the joy of seeing Him in His resplendent glory enthroned in the new Jerusalem. What a joy that will be indeed!

B. That we would know His love (vv. 25-26)

Jesus describes the great tragedy in the world: “the world does not know you...” What a tragedy indeed, but we, the disciples of Jesus, do know God, and, knowing Him, we have come to know His love. The goal of our salvation is not just the forgiveness of our sins. The forgiveness of our sins is the means to the end. The end is that we be unified with one another and with the living God and there behold His glory and enjoy His love. What a salvation indeed!

Discussion Questions

1. What difference does it make to you that Jesus is praying for you?
2. Why does He pray for our unity? What are some benefits of unity among the Church family? What are the disadvantages of disunity?
3. What is the “secret” to unity among human beings? How does this “secret” work in unifying us?
4. What practical things can we do to promote the unity of the Church?
5. Describe a moment in your life when you profoundly experienced the unity of the Church. What effect did that experience have on your spiritual life?
6. How do verses 24-26 encourage you?

Going Deeper

1. Is there anyone in the church with whom you need to be reconciled and to whom you need to apologize? Is there any reason not to take measure this week to seek reconciliation?
2. Is there a relationship between other believers in the church that you can help reconcile? Is there any reason why you wouldn't take initiative to help reconcile that?