

John 17:20-26

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[0 : 00] Just focus in on the last part of Christ's prayer in John 17. This particular chapter has meant a lot to me over the years as I've been at death's doorstep multiple times with my physical illnesses I've had.

And it's one of the few passages that kind of give us a direction to look at life beyond this life. And it's raised my mind to God and eternity.

It's commonly referred to as the high priestly prayer of Christ. And indeed, it is the true Lord's Prayer. The one we're familiar with, the one in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, tend to be more known as the Disciples' Prayer, where He teaches His disciples to pray.

So this truly is the Lord's Prayer. It's a, what does Jesus pray? What is He like when He speaks to the Father? It's only about 650 words.

It just takes a couple minutes to read. But it is deep and profound. Every single word of it, you could exhaust. Many years ago, on a commentary on John 17, Calvin wrote, This prayer of Christ is a safe harbor.

[1 : 18] And whoever retreats into it is safe from all danger of shipwreck. For it has, Christ has solemnly sworn that He will devote His care and diligence to our salvation.

Let the world then condemn us a thousand times. This alone ought to satisfy us. That Christ acknowledges us to be His heritage and pleas with the Father for us.

So this prayer is just one of a kind. You don't find anything like this anywhere else in the Scripture. It kind of looks like Moses' prayer, sort of, at the end of Deuteronomy, before Moses departs this world.

And so think about what's on Jesus' mind, just the context. He's spending time with His disciples. He's finished the Last Supper with them. And they're getting ready to kind of go towards Gethsemane.

And during this time, He lifts up His voice to the Father. And He prays and pours out His voice to the Father. I'll give you a quick outline of the prayer. But we're only going to focus on the last part of it.

[2 : 22] There's three parts that we've typically divided this prayer up into. The first part is in verses 1 through 5. And this is Jesus' praise for Himself.

And the focus is the Father's glory. And in turn, His own glory. Second part, Jesus prays for His disciples. We see that in verse 6 through 19.

And the focus of the Christ prayer during that time is preservation and mission. And then thirdly, what we'll be focusing on today is Jesus' praise for the present and future believers.

The key is their oneness and unity. So that's what we're focusing in on today. But you see in verse 20, Jesus says, I do not ask for these only, but also those who will believe in Me through their word. And so Jesus is confident that His disciples, after all that's about to happen, are going to return. And they're going to go out. And they're going to preach the good news.

[3 : 29] And start the church. Read in Acts chapter 2, verse 42. This happened. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, the breaking of bread and to prayers.

So Jesus in this time prays for us. And it's known, this whole prayer, John 17, reveals to us one of the very unique and specific roles, I don't think a lot of us think about maybe on a daily basis, but a role that Christ plays in our lives.

A significant role. He is our great high priest. As sinners that are unclean and unable to go into the holy presence of God, Jesus paid the final sacrifice for our sins and gave us His righteousness so that we could stand clean before God.

And now He intercedes on our behalf. 700 years ago, before Christ, Isaiah actually gave us a glimpse of this role in prophesying about the work of Christ and the Messiah, the suffering servant, in Isaiah 53.

Starting in verse 11. You don't have to turn there. There's one other place for you to look at today outside this. But we get a glimpse of His priestly work on our behalf. But Isaiah spoke 700 years before Christ.

[4 : 59] Out of the anguish of his soul, he shall see and be satisfied. By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous.

And he shall bear their iniquities. There's like the salvific part of this. Christ died on our behalf. Verse 12. Therefore, I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoiled with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death, and he was numbered with the transgressors. Yet he bore the sins of many and makes intercession for the transgressors. He stands before the Father, right?

Making intercession on our behalf. And that's what the writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 8, 1 and 2. He expresses Christ's priestly care for us.

So think about this. We're about to read the passage together. But some of you may have someone in your life who has a very deep walk with Christ, who enjoys such deep fellowship with God.

[6 : 10] And when, if you said, if I would like to just pray with one person before I face this trial, who would that person be? Right?

What friend would you think of? But a cool thought, as we begin to read this, is Robert Murray McShane, young Scottish pastor in the 1800s, preached a sermon on John 17.

And he said this, really profound. If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. Yet distance makes no difference.

He is praying for me. It's amazing. So let's read the passage together. We're just going to focus on the last part of this. John 17, look at verse 20.

Jesus praying. He says, I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 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.

[7 : 24] The glory that you have given me, I have given to them. That they may all be one, even as we are one. I in them, and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may also know that you have sent me, and love them even as you love me.

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, the glory of the Father, even though, I'm sorry, because, forgive me, typo here, they may see my glory, that you have given me, because you love me, before the foundation of the world.

Oh, righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know you, that you have sent me. I have 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.

Join me in a quick word of prayer. Father, we just looked up this time to you, please work in our hearts, through your Holy Spirit, apply, apply your word, to our hearts, that we would not walk away, from this place, unchanged, that you would give us, a picture of what, you prayed for us, long ago, you give us deep insight, into your word, Lord, in Christ's name, Amen.

So, we're going to break this up, into a few different pieces, but, point number one, as we're walking through this passage, point number one, is Jesus prays, for true unity, among believers.

[9 : 12] Jesus prays, for true unity, among believers. And so, under number one, we see, there's a few sub points, but the sub point, A, underneath this, is he has, a request, for true unity.

Look at verse 21, that they may all, be one. Alright? And, a good, way to kind of, get to the heart of this, about what true unity means, is to kind of expose, what false unity, actually is.

Many in the church today, and most people, well meaning, will make remarks like, Christians just seem so divided, how come there's so many different, churches, how come there's different, denominations, after all, like isn't just Jesus, all that matters, and they'll kind of like, simplify, the Christian life, with phrases like that, and they'll say like, we need to do something, to create unity, among believers.

And again, I know, like well meeting people, who have said such things, but often, thoughts like that, are kind of misguided, and, and ignorant. false, superficial unity, sometimes, is created, at the expense, of truth, and doctrine.

Churches may avoid, hard, Bible topics, just so they can, make people feel, better, about, themselves. But let me give you, a couple of diagnostic questions, when it comes to this idea, of unity.

[10:46] A couple of diagnostic questions. What are the first things, that people talk about, when they ask you about, when you ask them, about their church? That's when it goes, Christ's family, tell me about that church.

Like what's the first thing you say? Or somebody else, like what comes out of their mouth? Like what do you enjoy, about that church? The second question, is us asking ourselves, is what is the gathering component, of a local church?

Like why do people come there? Like what's the purpose? What's the goal? What brings them together? And often in today's, contemporary, evangelicalism, local churches have a large, range of gathering components.

Alright? There's many demographics. There's the age demographic. I like going to this church, because it has a youth program, or teenagers, or older people, or young adults.

Singles. That's why we like going there. Another demographic. Some sort of effeminity, right? That church has a lot of families.

[11:56] I like going to that church. Or a lot of children. Or these people seem, richer upper class, or middle class, or whatever it may be. A big one, among today's denominations, are music.

Do you have contemporary cool music, or do you have the old people, organ, you know, piano music? Like they'll go, I've heard people say, that's why they go where they go. Programs.

This is probably the biggest one. This church has a place for me, and my family to plug in. We have all these different things. We have children's ministries, youth ministries, college ministries, single ministries, on and on and on.

We have a drama team, whatever it may be, right? So, we don't have a drama team here. So, also facilities. That's a really nice building.

That's a beautiful church building, and a great parking lot, you know, on and on. They have good coffee, whatever it may be. So, there's all sorts of things that people say is the gathering component of their church.

[13:00] Right? I heard on a local Christian radio station a while back, they were allowing people to call in, and I said, this was the question, how do you do church?

And you got all kind of crazy answers on that. But here's the deal. One of the big problems with focusing on demographics as a point of unity is that something happens to that component? Your church is gone. If that component was removed, would that church divide? Would it break up? What would happen? The gathering component, for any other reason than the Lord Jesus Christ, that church will fail.

That church won't stand. But isn't it sad, though, that the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, that He bought with His own blood, usually, or sometimes, is not the gathering component for why a church gathers.

It's all kind of other things other than His life, His death, and His resurrection. That's the main event for which we gather. But many churches do not. It is that bother you that many people ask the question, how do you do church when really, the only thing that matters is what would Christ have us do when we gather?

[14:11] What is His opinion? He is the head of the church. It is His church, His bride. He has told us what we ought to be doing when we gather. And it is heartbreaking that thousands of people have flocked to local churches even this morning to get a quick fix, to have a real quick shot of feel-goodism, a pop psychology talk that has nothing to do with God's Word.

Or isn't it sad that the first thing that people think of of their church is a pastor or a program, something that enhances their life instead of the Son of God?

Right? So please, I'm not saying that it's okay to mention some of the good things about our church, but I pray that Christ is the gathering component. I pray He is why we gather.

Period. And I tremble to think how Christ would see some churches when you look at Revelation chapter, the early chapters when He addresses the churches.

And He commends them for good things and He condemns them for bad things. Right? Underneath this first point about Jesus praying for unity is another point.

[15 : 25] Point B. What is the source of true unity? What is the source of true unity? Look at verse 21 and 22. That they may all be one just as you, Father, are in me and I in you.

that they also may be in us. Look at verse 22. The glory that you have given me, I have given to them that they may be one even as we are one.

I in them and you in me that they may be perfectly one. Alright? So, based on this text, very clearly, we see that unity is not something that we create.

It's something that exists already. It's not of human origin. It's something that exists in the nature of God Himself. The unity of all believers is grounded in the love and unity that exists in the Godhead. Okay? Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are united completely, perfectly one in their motive, in their glory, in their mission, in their redemptive purpose.

[16 : 40] They are perfectly one, unified. So, spiritual unity comes to us from the reality of His redemptive activity in our lives.

Okay? Unity, we should be concerned about, is not a physical, visible unity in our lives, but a unity that is not outward and physical but one that's spiritual and invisible.

Unseen. Spiritual unity. That they would be perfectly one. Alright? Really quickly, this is the only place you have to turn outside of our main passage, but hold your hand, John 17.

Look at Ephesians chapter 4. Paul writing to the church at Ephesus and he kind of clears the air on what unity actually is. Ephesians 4, verse 1, and he's addressing the church, and he says in verse 1, I therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain that there it is, the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

[18 : 20] So there's a lot to talk about right there. Just think about two things if you notice. Unity is completely a spiritual matter and not physical.

Alright? Our passage, the Scripture, doesn't define unity in a physical, fluctuating, visible way. Rather, it's this constant unity that is invisible.

Christ's prayer is answered every time a dead sinner is raised from death and brought into His kingdom. But secondly, notice this about this passage, that unity is maintained and preserved, not created.

Okay? It already exists because of Christ and His Spirit that dwells within us. So we're called to preserve it, protect it, right?

Not create it. Not to find some outward thing that brings us unity. Very clear passage. So let me just give you a quick example of this.

[19 : 24] For many years, they no longer have this conference, but in Louisville, every other year, they had a conference called Together for the Gospel. And at this conference, you had guys from different denominational backgrounds, primarily Southern Baptists, Presbyterian guys, Baptists like Mark Dever, and John Piper, John MacArthur, Al Mohler.

Then you had PCA guys, Presbyterian guys like Spurl, Ligon Duncan, Kevin DeYoung, and they were all just really good buddies, all just really good friends.

They disagree like on certain issues like baptism or like church government, but they are all really close. They're saying we are united in Christ. We are united in the Gospel, right?

And such close friends. So it can go across denominational lines. In fact, I'm okay with denominations because it actually means that people have convictions about things, right? We actually believe something that the Scripture teaches.

But there is unity that exists in those who have been born again and who have believed in the Gospel, right? There is spiritual unity. The last little part underneath point number one is this, the result of true unity.

[20 : 47] The result of true unity. Verse 21, the second part, he says, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. look at verse 23, so that the world may know that you have sent me and love them even as you have loved me.

And so, the result of true unity, one of those is evangelistic. Sin causes division and hatred. Sin causes people to separate, go their own ways.

the church is meant to be one of the greatest ways that we display to a dying world who God actually is and what was meant before the fall, right?

By loving one another well, loving in the grace of God, living in community with one another. I've heard it said a long time ago that the church is the Gospel made visible.

Like, the world is to see the unity that we have because of Christ and because of the indwelling Spirit. Right? Beautiful. Jesus says that that unity, that oneness that He prayed for is attractive to those that God is working in, right?

[22 : 05] To the outside world. We are to be the light of the world. Jesus said that you are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden, right? Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Right? So that's one goal, one result of true unity is it's evangelistic. Jesus says that, that they would, a world may see and know me, right? And then underneath this also, another result of true unity.

I love this part. In Christ we have all things in common. Alright? Many of you can give testimony to this, that Christ has a tendency to bring together people who otherwise would never be around each other.

Like, very different types of people. All kind of categories of people. It doesn't matter what social background you have, what ethnic background you have, Christ brings us together into his church, his family.

And that thought of like whenever you encounter another believer, some of you have traveled far outside the U.S. and it feels a little isolating and you don't really feel like people, anybody around you knows that you're a Christian and you're kind of alone.

[23 : 19] And then you bump into somebody else who is and you just immediately have this like, yes, they are in the faith. They are a brother or a sister. And you immediately have this connection with them.

But God brings together all types of different people that otherwise would not spend any time together, probably. Growing up, I was a part of like the good old boy country crowd that drove trucks, deer hunted, and fished.

And I love to see just that over the years, that kind of means less and less to me. It's more as I've seen people that have been saved by Christ and I have more in common with them than even my own family sometimes.

And we have, I have a good buddy of mine who is sort of a punk rocker background. Right? And I would have never hung out with that guy outside of Christ. And brothers and sisters from every nation, every tribe, every tongue, Christ brings us together and we have all things in common. Right? That's the answer to all the stuff you see in our world right now. The gospel. Christ. The church. This brings us to point number two.

[24 : 35] Point number two. Jesus prays for the future glory of believers. He prays for the future glory of believers.

And then two parts underneath that. In one way, part A, the fellowship and focus of our future glory. Look at verse 24.

He says, 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. Such a beautiful picture here. At the outset of Christ's prayer, right, he asked the Father to restore him to the place of glory that he enjoyed with the Father before creation.

So you get this glimpse of what happened before the world was created. Christ dwelt in perfect joy and satisfaction with the Father, right, before anything ever was created.

[25 : 41] That's a beautiful picture of what existed. If you look at verse 5 of chapter 17, just kind of looking back a little bit, he kind of says the same thing. He says, Now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

It's an amazing thought. Think and ponder that. Right? Something I want you to think of just right now, think about one of the most beautiful scenes that you've ever seen with your eyes, or one of the most beautiful noises you ever heard with your ears.

It might be like a sunset over the mountains or the ocean. It might be hearing a great musical performance or a monumental sporting event.

And notice that in those moments, things that just sort of take your breath away, you're not thinking about yourself at all. You're carried outside of yourself. Right? Two things kind of happened during that time.

Something in us longs for another person to be there with us to share that rich experience. You ever thought that? Like, man, I wish that person was here to see this.

[26 : 56] And typically, the ones that we love the most, typically the people that are closest to us, who want them to be there to behold this beautiful thing with us. This, in a small way, is what I believe Christ is saying, a small way, that He desires for us to be with Him where He is so that we may behold His glory, the glory that existed before the world was created.

Not because He needs us, just because He's gracious, just because He wants us to be in His presence. He chose to set His love upon us. Right? So that's one thing.

We want for other people to be there. Secondly, we want to not just look at something that's magnificent. We actually want to dive into it.

We don't want to just stare at it from a distance. We want to go and actually be a part of what we see. We want to be in the middle of it. I remember the first time I ever saw the Scottish Highlands in 2009.

I was on a bus. As soon as I saw it, I was like, oh my gosh, that is beautiful. I was like, I wanted to jump through the window to go out and get into it. I want to drop me off right here and I will go backpacking all day by myself.

[28 : 11] I didn't just want to look at it from a distance. I remember in 1995 a little boy listening to the radio about the Braves World Series and it made me go to bed.

I couldn't stay up and watch it. So, the whole like, Braves win, Braves win. I wanted to be a part of that celebration. I wanted to be in the middle of it. C.S. Lewis wrote, we do not want merely to see beauty, though God knows even that is bounty enough.

We want something else which we can hardly put into words, to be united with the beauty that we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves and to bathe in it and to become a part of it.

And so, when we leave this world and go and behold God's glory and the glory of Christ, we want to see it and be a part of it. We want to be in the middle of that glory.

There's no better thing in this world. Nothing can compare to the glory that we will behold one day.

Paul wrote, quoting Isaiah, what no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.

[29 : 30] Amazing thing. So, a focus of fellowship and future glory is what we see in these verses. And secondly, underneath this part, is we will enjoy unhindered fellowship with God.

Unhindered fellowship with God. Think about the times where you have just enjoyed being in the presence of God. Like some of the sweetest moments of fellowship, when you were in prayer, when you were in God's word, when you were just alone somewhere, or in the presence of his people. And it just seemed like in that moment you just had a real sense of God's presence with you. In an abnormal way, almost. You felt his nearness to you, thinking about how he saved you from your sin, giving you life, enjoying gratitude, or just filling your soul.

You just want to say, pause. I just want to stay right here, right? But then something happens.

Interference usually steps in. You get hungry, you get tired, hangry for some of you.

Somebody knocks on your door, you get an annoying text message. Whatever it may be, there's moments that just interrupt us. They pull us away from those depths of fellowship.

[30 : 52] We're kind of dragged down from heaven, as it were, back to earth, back to just being here. And it feels like we only can get so close in this life.

But, when we die, when we shed this weak, mortal flesh, and it passes away, we will have uninterrupted, unhindered fellowship with Christ and the Father.

Right? Eternity will not be spent with human beings paying back the debt that we owe God, because that is impossible. The grace that we have been saved, we can never pay it back.

But for all eternity, we will be the beneficiaries of God's kindness. Right? Christ has done this, Ephesians 2, 7, that in the coming ages, He might show us the immeasurable riches of His grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

Some of you, many of you, who have children or grandchildren, know that at a certain age, you do something goofy or fun, and they like it, and then what do they tell you?

[32 : 01] Do it again. Do it again. Even like for an hour, you just do the same thing, over and over again, and they never get tired of it. Boredom is something that fallen creatures experience.

Right? But the newness of standing in Christ's presence forever will never get old. We will enjoy that unhindered fellowship with God, on and on.

Debating whether to read this to you or not, I'm not usually a fan of long quotes during sermons, but I'm going to read this one to you really quickly. Spurgeon wrote a sermon on John 17 and he says, I doubt not that there are many joys in heaven which will amplify the grand joy with which we will have.

I feel confident that meeting of departed friends, the society of apostles, priests, and prophets, and martyrs will amplify the joy of the redeemed.

So in other words, I'm sure there are many things in heaven that are going to help bring us joy. Good things. But still, the Son that will give them the greatest light to their joy will be the fact that they are with Jesus Christ.

[33 : 18] And behold his face. And now, there may be other employments in heaven, but that mentioned in this text is the chief one, John 17, that they may behold my glory.

Let us pass in a panorama before your eyes with great scenes of this glory that you will behold after death.

The moment the soul departs from this body, it will behold the glory of Christ. The glory of his person will be the first thing that will arrest your attention.

There he will sit in the midst of the throne, and our eyes will be first caught with his glory of his appearance. Oh, how will the Christian stop at the foot of his master's throne and look upward? And if there could be tears in heaven, tears of rich delight would roll down his cheeks when he looks and sees the man enthroned and says to him, how often I used to sing about you on the earth.

[34 : 25] Crown him with many crowns. King of kings and lord of lords. This version ends like by writing this poem. Millions of years are wandering eyes.

Shall our savior's beauties rove. And myriads of ages will adore the wonders of his love. So it'll be a joy that is unceasing in heaven.

We'll never be bored beholding the glory of the father and the son. And then lastly, landing the plane here is part B. There will be a foretaste of future glory.

Look at verse 25. Oh, righteous father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me.

I have made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

[35 : 26] So beautiful words. Jesus says, righteous father, expresses this great confidence that his father hears his prayer, and he will fulfill his request. He says about this righteous God, a fallen world does not know Christ, it does not know God, but the son knows God, and the son has made him known to us.

Jesus has shown us who the father is. The moment that we are born again, we have fellowship with God, and we continue to throughout the duration of our lives, and sanctification, but knowing Christ, experiencing his glory, and his fellowship, starts now.

We get glimpses, we get tastes, but it starts now. Jesus said, I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly. Having this life that is rooted in fellowship with Christ.

So even now, with all the distractions, and all the stuff, even in this moment, right, we can enjoy the presence of Christ with us. We may get a start on eternity now, but one day, Paul says that we will enjoy the unsearchable riches of Christ.

So be thankful for these times of fellowship that you have now. They're just a foretaste of what is to come. So taste and see that the Lord is good. So just a beautiful picture of what Christ prayed for you, for me, and for every believer that followed after he left the earth, that we would be one, that we would behold his glory one day.

[37 : 09] So just join me in a word of prayer.