

Jesus Prays for All Believers

Text: John 17:20-26

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Scr. Reading: John 17:20-26

BELIEVE! The Gospel of John

It's no exaggeration to say that our world is falling apart. That's not being pessimistic; it's just being honest. And biblical. Paul wrote: "The creation itself [experiences] bondage to decay" and that even now "the whole creation groans," waiting for renewal (Rom 8:21-22).

Monday morning we were horrified to learn that another mass shooting had occurred in our country, this one topping all the worst lists in terms of its scale, its apparent randomness, and its effects on our political discourse.

The conversations I've had this week have been filled with open doors for the gospel. Everyone is asking, "What is wrong with our society?" Of course they are—the problems are obvious, but we have no way of knowing for certain WHY they exist. Not just mass shootings, but racism and war and our national inability to engage in civil discourse and even hurricanes. It's obvious something is wrong with our world, but as a society we seem to have no way of identifying exactly what it is:

- Eastern Religion says "The physical world is the problem" – pain, suffering, loss, limitation
- Animism says "Cosmic forces are the problem" – feng shui, astrology
- Nature-based religions say "Human beings are the problem" – exploitation, pollution, human destruction of the natural world
- Class-based thinking says "Power is the problem" – majority culture, oppression, nationalism, aggression
- Humanism says "Ignorance/unrealized human potential is the problem" – bigotry, superstition, fear
- Atheism says "Religion is the problem" – power, ignorance
- Psychology says, "Sickness is the problem" – mental health, self image, chemical imbalance

No consensus! People in our society are like a little kid waking up terrified in the middle of the night, with no idea what we should be terrified about.

What an opportunity and privilege Christians have to be able to speak

into that confusion and say, "Christianity gives us these answers. God has spoken! We have supernatural revelation from outside ourselves."

The Bible says human sin is the problem. Worshiping self instead of worshiping God. Rebellion against God, worshiping the creation instead of the creator → THIS is the cause of everything else wrong with the world. ***Sin isn't just violating moral taboos; sin is vandalism.*** It's a destructive attack on the fabric of the universe. God creates harmony and order; sin is disintegration, fragmentation, breakdown, chaos. Thankfully, Jesus came to restore unity and harmony to the entire created order:

Ephesians 1:10 *[God's] plan for the fullness of time [is] to unite all things in him [Jesus Christ], things in heaven and things on earth.*

It's what Jesus prays for in today's sermon text—oneness among His followers as a foretaste and preview of the oneness He intends to bring to the entire universe. He's saying, "Father, reverse all the effects of the curse in their lives. Bring them together again in perfect harmony:

John 17:20-23 *"I do not ask for these [11 disciples] 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... 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.."*

Four times He says it, echoing what He said earlier in v11:

v11 *Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.*

THIS is Jesus' grand design for His followers: Unity. You might wonder, "Of all the things He could have asked, why this? Why not holiness, likeness to Jesus? Or great spiritual power? Or self-sacrificing in love as He had?" Of course, Jesus wants all that for His followers. But unity rises to the top because it is so clearly what our world needs. And it's so powerfully what the gospel brings. **The gospel is the ultimate message of reconciliation.** The cross brings together God and man. It unites Jew and Gentile, male and female, free and slave. It heals the soul, restoring wholeness and health to our inner being. What could He possibly pray about that is more important than unity? His prayer reveals 3 aspects:

- The NATURE of Christian Unity
- The MEANS to Christian Unity
- The EFFECT of Christian Unity

The NATURE of Christian Unity

vv20-21 *"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,*

Jesus describes this unity for which He's praying with a striking comparison: "JUST AS you, Father, are in me and I in you." In other words, He's talking about a unity paralleled by the oneness among the members of the Godhead. All through this gospel, Jesus has insisted that He and His Father are one (Jn 10:30). His words, His works, His will are all directly from His Father. He doesn't act or speak on His own.

Several times, Jesus goes beyond even that language and says He and the Father mutually indwell one another:

10:38 *...the Father is in me and I am in the Father.*

14:10-11 *Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. (cf. 14:20)*

Same here in this text:

17:21 *...that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us...*

17:23 *I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one...*

The point here is more shared identity than shared space. The Father and Son are inherently bound together in every way, including how they think about themselves. The Son's identity is wrapped up in the Father so much that when you know Jesus, you've known the Father.

This is fascinating and powerful revelation for us about the nature of God. Within the Godhead is a rich social dynamic, a deep desire for and experience of community. We might expect the Son of God to be self-contained, composed, serene, silent. But this is precisely what we do not find! Jesus LIVED in conversation with His Father. His whole being was defined by communion, relationship, friendship, companionship.

It's no wonder the cross was so terrifying to Him. Recall what He did on the cross: took sin into His own body—disintegration, separation. Remember His cry? "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" No

wonder He cried out like that. After this kind of ongoing, intimate communion with the Father, that experience of separation was hell for Him.

When you see it this way, it's obvious what Christian unity is NOT:

- NOT in any way superficial, a show of solidarity, oneness in appearance only. It's a deep, inherent connectedness.
- NOT a result of putting aside differences and just determining to all get along. The members of the Godhead are one in spirit, one in purpose, one in essence.
- NOT something that must be worked up or developed through personal effort. The oneness between Father and Son is not something they strive to create. It just IS. By virtue of the fact that both Father and Son are God, they *are one* with each other.

Paul writes:

Ephesians 4:3 *... [be] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

We can't create it. The Spirit does that. We simply maintain it.

Notice how Jesus describes this oneness:

- all-encompassing – "that they ALL may be one" (v21)
- observable – the world can see it (v21c)
- He expects it to grow to perfection – "that they may become perfectly one" (v23)

You say, "That's impossible. Could never happen." It was a supernatural oneness the church in Acts knew by experience:

Acts 4:32 *Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.*

Keep in mind, this church has 10,000+ members (cf 4:4). In spite of that huge size, where we might assume it could be hard to feel connected, every single person was united in one heart and soul.

So how does it happen?

The MEANS to Christian Unity

vv22-23a *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...

Jesus has made perfect provision for oneness – has made our unity possible. How? “The glory you have given me I have given them SO THAT they may be one.” He has given His glory. What is that?

He says it’s the glory His Father gave Him: “the glory you have given me” (v22). It seems to be the glory given Him during His earthly life – cf. 1:14 “glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” During His earthly life, Jesus was the bearer of God’s glory, and now the church alone bears that glory.

God’s glory came down on Mount Sinai when Moses received the Law. From there, it filled the tabernacle and then came to the temple—the place where God’s beauty and glory were seen on earth. But then, during Jesus’ earthly life, the glory of God came to rest on a Man, replacing the temple. Now the thought is of the glory of God passing to Jesus’ followers, indwelling them.

vv22-23a *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...*

We can’t indwell each other, but we can indwell God and He indwell us, which allows us to connect to each other. It is this presence of glory in our midst that makes us one. As the church draws its life from the Spirit, it reflects God’s glory, love, and joy. **Christian unity is a supernatural oneness borne of our shared experience of God.**

APP: This should shape everything we think about what the church is and does in the world. What IS the church at its essence? This is what we are—a display of God’s glory in the world. The church is the manifestation of the living God.

“This is the *essence* of Jesus’ vision for the church. It is not a community that heals people just so that they will be whole (though healing is important); it is not a community that teaches so that people will be gratified by knowledge (though wisdom is valuable); it is not a community that evangelizes so that it will grow its ranks (though its mission to the world is crucial). The church is a community that invites people to touch the glory of God, to be changed by it, and to bear it to the world.” (Burge 477)

The profound unity Jesus prays for will come about, not by being unity conscious, but by being Christ conscious. It’s about looking away from our longing for unity and instead looking at God. In other words, unity is less a byproduct of discussion and diplomacy and more the result of worship, repentance, and prayer. The degree to which we focus on God together will be the degree to which we find common ground in our lives together.

Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshipers [meeting] together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become ‘unity’ conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.

~ A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*

The EFFECT of Christian Unity

vv21b, 23b *...that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me... 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.*

Here is Jesus’ goal: “that the world may believe.” Unity is the most powerful apologetic we have. The church’s oneness makes its witness credible. Unity yields evangelism. People *are saved* because of this.

When the church is filled with God’s Spirit and God’s glory fills this body like it filled the temple, it will have a quality of life that stands out so much, the world can’t help but notice. It’s what the world yearns for. Notice this, friends: Christianity isn’t offering useless or frivolous gifts to the world. Your neighbors and coworkers long for this. It’s what they need, and deep down they know it. When we are one with Christ and thus one with each other, there’s a witness that cannot be refuted.

Notice again how Jesus says it in verse 23:

v23b *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.

It's a powerfully attractive thought—to realize that you've just stumbled into a whole group of people who are truly and deeply loved by God! The world desperately wants to believe in a God of love. But they don't. Their fallen hearts are suspicious of Him. They assume He wants to steal their fun and rain down punishment on them for their many missteps. If people really truly believed in a God of love, wouldn't they gladly surrender their whole lives to follow Him? Obey Him? Know Him?

People are looking for the reality of God, something great, something beyond themselves. Modernity suggested that rationalism would do away with people's need for God, but it hasn't. Spiritual interest is everywhere. Often, what people evaluate first is the quality of the "worship"—that part of the service which feels most transcendent, most in touch with God.

And then to learn that this transcendent God is also a God of love? That's powerful.

This is the stuff of Jesus' final request: eternal glory, knowing God, being filled with His love:

vv24-26 *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."*

It's a broken, hurting world. How about this, the next time you're in one of those conversations where people are asking "What's wrong with the world?" Listen, empathize, connect. And when the time is right, say something like: "If you don't mind my saying so, I find such comfort in the Christian explanation for what's wrong, and here's why—there's a known solution! Sin is our ultimate problem, and Jesus' is our ultimate answer. He has promised to restore everything broken and unify every division. And here's the really great part—we don't have to wait until sometime way off there and then to experience it. The church—my church!—is His proof that unity is not only possible, it's happening!"

You say: "But my friends don't even believe in God or Jesus." ANS: According to Jesus, the unity of the church is the strongest argument you could make for the truthfulness of your claims.

YOU: "I'm not sure my friends need organized religion right now." ANS: You're not inviting them to organized religion; you're inviting them to experience the indwelling presence of the glory of God.

YOU: "But will it work? So many people are hurt and disillusioned by the church!" ANS: I know. It happens. But this is what Jesus prayed for, and if He prayed for it, I believe it's guaranteed to happen. The church WILL be unified. The world WILL believe. And God WILL be glorified forever. Amen?

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