

## Pray

### Intro - Open to John 17:20-26

Jesus expands his focus from this small group of eleven disciples to all Christians who will believe because of their testimony.

This is a great point to recognize that when we discuss the church there are at least two ways to think of it. First is a local church, our gathering here. Bonded in Christ but gathered uniquely by God's plans by geography, culture, language and gifting. Meaning, you most likely come here to Bethany because of the first three. Proximity, culture (family), and less unique by language. You are not at the Spanish or Russian speaking church this morning. Second, is the universal church. This is not a gathering but rather a people united across time, space and congregations to encompass all the elect who will be with God in heaven. You come to Christ and join the universal church by default, yet God calls you to use your gifts in a local church.

So as we head back to Jesus's prayer, we see him prepping the disciples to understand the greatness of God's church and therefore extends the focus of his prayer... we must focus on what Jesus sees as the unique challenges for the church.

#### **Christ's Church displays his Gospel and his Glory in its unity and love.**

Now, as we walk through this passage it will be a little different for us than in past sermons. The theme of unity and love runs through the passage, and then its purposes to display the Gospel and Christ's glory in the church come out of that. So we will read the passage and take note of what it shows us of unity and love and then go back through to see its impact.

#### **One – His Church in unity and love**

Read John 17:20-26

<sup>20</sup> "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. <sup>26</sup> 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 prays for all those who will believe in Him through their word. Us! This is those who hear the preaching of Peter, read the Gospel of Matthew, read the writings of John, the letters of Paul, and the rest of the New Testament and respond in faith. This will lead to a rapid spread of this message, new believers, and the birth of the church. Just like a child, as the church grows, growing pains need relief. Relief through unity and love.

First, Jesus's prayer for unity, like we said last week, it is vital in our fractured world. Jesus has been praying through topics he has been teaching and emphasizing. What is implicit in Chapter 15 as we are branches together in a vine, and mentioned in verse 11, becomes a repeated refrain here in his closing sentences. We need unity, a perfect unity that ties us back to the perfect unity in our triune God. We must be one because we are one with Christ and as he says at the end, "I in them". Christ indwells believers. This goes for those in the 1<sup>st</sup> century all the way to now. The indwelling of Christ unifies the church across the ages.

Second, the bond is deeper than a new reality, it changes our affections. Love from God becomes the natural companion of our union with Christ and union with others. Verse 23 says, "they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me." Our unity is a display to the world of God's love, like God loves Christ. The love of a father for a son, becomes the love that God pours out on us, his beloved in Christ. Then he closes in verse 26, that the love we receive came from the Father to the Son and of that same love, Christ gives to us.

There are big divisions within the church today. Ethnicity, culture and geography are real dividers that give the church a challenge to be united in love. The early church fought this first with the entrance of the Gentiles into the church. They were not God's people. But there they were, receiving the Holy Spirit, being born again. Several letters deal with church divisions over this conflict of Judaizers, or Jew-first. Or they address those showing

partiality or preference of the rich over the poor.

They, and now we, must look beyond the circumstances of our first birth, our skin color, our finances, or our birthplace and look to our new birth for a new identity, a new family, and a new home.

The Puritan Thomas Brooks said “Discord and division become no Christian. For wolves to worry the lambs is no wonder, but for one lamb to worry another, this is unnatural and monstrous.”

We are called to unity in mind and affections. Unity in truth and love. Unity is put on display for the world to see. And that is where we go next, because our unity and love are good results, but God makes more of them as he uses us to display his love to the world through His Gospel.

## Two – His Gospel in unity and love

Read 17:20-23

<sup>20</sup> “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, <sup>23</sup> 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.

Implicit in there being more disciples to pray for is the necessity of the apostles, the 11 gathered to hear this prayer, to share the good news, the Gospel of Jesus Christ so others will believe. There will be no one to be unified with unless the transforming message goes out.

The Good News, or the Gospel that the apostles will preach is about the life, death and resurrection of the God-Man Jesus. Paul preached this in 1 Corinthians 15, starting in verse 3.

<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

It goes on but this is the earliest statement of mere Christianity. The earliest

summary of the message that Paul and the disciples delivered.

Peter on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came as Jesus promised, he preached to the Jews about Jesus as coming from God the Father, but they themselves crucified and stand condemned for their sin against God. Acts 2:37 says they were cut to the heart, convicted that they indeed did kill God in flesh. So, they ask, **what shall we do. So Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”** 3000 were baptized and the church was born.

Today we teach and preach the same message: That he was sent by the Father to pay for the sins of the world, and that by believing in him as he claimed to be, you can have eternal life in Him. Jesus referencing his sentness here in this prayer, his commission from God, is a reference to both his divinity in his nature, and the divine source of his mission which he will complete on the cross.

Jesus is explicit in the purpose of their unity in verse 21, **“so that the world may believe that you have sent me”**. That they believe the gospel. Believe, as in saving faith, will come to some in the world so they can become the ones called out like the disciples. Verse 22 speaks of glory which we will get to in a moment, but this glory leads to further unity so that they may become perfectly one. The perfect love of God may be seen on display here on earth so that the world will again believe that Jesus was sent by God, having divine origin, and that God loves them.

It is vital to understand that we, the church, are the way the world either hears or misses the love of God. Of course, the world is full of unrighteousness and will be condemned by God’s wrath being poured out on them as Romans 1 says for suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. Yet, for those in the world who might be saved, God has chosen those who will believe in him through the word of the Apostles, are to display unity and love.

If you think that a lone ranger Christian mentality can be enough you need to reread these verses. Tracts and gospel conversations are great but right here Jesus is praying to the Father for you and stresses your unity with the church. He stresses that unity displays the love of God. So, if you hate the church? If you stay away from the church what does that say about the love of God for the Son? God has saved us to be together here on earth because he has saved us to be together with Him for eternity.

This is what at stake in our fellowship with your fellow believers here at Bethany, with biblical churches of like faith and practice in Sedalia and beyond, and with Christians back through the ages. We cannot throw them out or claim superiority or display a lack of love because we will be with them for eternity and the world is watching how we treat our own.

Now, we do not compromise truth, we treat our own with redemptive calling back to the truth when they stray. But we must consider: Is the pure love of God, defined by the Bible, going to be on display as I live with my brothers and sisters in Christ? Will the one in the world who will be called by God tomorrow see God's love in this?

Christ's Gospel message is both shared and modeled in the unified and loving disciples. This will be for the display and adding to His Glory.

### **Three – His Glory in unity and love**

Read 17:22-24

**<sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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.**

As we turn to the Glory of Christ in our unity and love, we must turn back to verses 4 & 5, to where the prayer began. Then we can see where it ends because both will help us understand the glory the Father has given to Christ and therefore, he has given to his disciples.

**<sup>4</sup> I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup> And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.**

Jesus has accomplished the work of teaching and showing that he is God in the flesh and he will finish the work in his sacrificial death on the cross for the sins of mankind and the glory of the completion of God's plans. So, Jesus asks in verse 5 to be glorified in heaven with the glory he had before he gave it up to put on flesh.

So back to verse 22 we go, where Jesus speaks of the glory God has given him, in his glorious work of testifying to the truth of his mission from the Father, he now hands off to the disciples to you and to me. We get the glory of being the ones, empowered by Christ in us, to point to him and say, THERE IS GOD!

Then in verse 24, his further glory, that God has been giving him in love from the foundation of the world, of full divinity will be on display again. He asks for us to be brought to heaven to where he dwells to see His glory fully revealed. He pulled back the curtain a bit at his Transfiguration, where his glory shone like a bright light for Peter, James and John. Now we are invited too.

Will you revel with me in this: **That God, before the world began, planned the whole of time from glorious beginning to glorious end. Creating creatures to worship him, and through salvation through his son, be transformed from rebels to willing servants. He gets even greater glory by showing his mercy and love, unifying us in a church which one day will be presented as a bride to its husband. Presented in purity and joy to Christ our husband. At the end of all this, we will display in each of us, in the whole of the church universal that God has brought by his power and divine attributes all of the beauty of redemption to a glorious completion!**

That is glory. It is a glory we participate in. It is a glory we witness. It is a glory we testify to. It is a glory we display as the unified and loved of God.

Jesus now concludes his prayer. Full of Gospel hope and Glory displayed in our unity and love.

## Conclusion

Read John 17:25-26

<sup>25</sup> O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. <sup>26</sup> 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.”

Like Holy Father before this, Righteous Father places a key attribute of God alongside his intimate call to his Father. This righteousness is key because God has chosen justly to reveal himself in Christ to save some and judge the world. He saves believers and judges unbelievers. It is an affirmation that God’s plans are good, very good, righteous in every way.

The love of Christ that we share in unity with one another should be the greatest advertisement to the truth of our message. It is to our shame that we fight over trivial things and do not fight fair or kindly or rooted in truth. Our interactions on the internet and in the public discourse must not compromise unity in the church and display the love we have for our brothers and sisters in Christ. We cannot compromise truth, but truth is not opposed to unity when our unity is in truth, the objective truth of the scripture.

As Jesus closes, he says that his work to make the name of God known will continue. His intercessory work continues in heaven and by his statement at the end, “I in them”, he continues his work in you and in me. We carry with us God’s presence and a continuation of his presence through biblical history.

God’s presence in the storm at Mt. Sinai descended to enter the tabernacle. As they journeyed to the promised land, his presence, and his holy Ark of the Covenant, was with them. In Christ, he tabernacle’s among us (as John 1:14 says, “he dwelt among us”). God’s presence is now in his followers, gathered as churches to proclaim the gospel and display the glory of God to the world. It is the beauty of a love on display like a wedding.

When you attend a wedding with your spouse, you may instinctively smile at your spouse remembering your wedding. When we remember our wedding to Christ, our unity with other believers and the love we share in and with Christ, our smile to one another this morning says it all.