

The Densest Moment | Jesus Christ's Farewell Conversation

"The Prayer of Jesus (Part Two)"

John 17.15-26

4.2.23

"I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.¹⁶ "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.¹⁷ "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. ¹⁸ "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

"For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. ²⁰ "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; ²¹ that they may all be one; even 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 sent Me.

²² "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; ²³ I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. ²⁴ "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

²⁵ "O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; ²⁶ and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

At the end of this *Upper Room Discourse*, a lengthy conversation between Jesus Christ and His disciples, they could be walking or sitting in the Temple. The Rabbi is praying aloud and the disciples are listening to His prayer.

In this longest of His recorded prayers, Jesus Christ sort of unfolds or expands on the more familiar model-prayer, *The Lord's Prayer*. He prays for the display of God's reign on earth: *"glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You... Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*

In this longest prayer, Jesus prays for Himself and the glory He and the Father will receive from the Cross – the greatest act of love in all of human history. He prays for His disciples to be kept and united in their hour of trial and for His joy to be full in them.

Today, the prayer concludes, Jesus Christ praying for the world into which those beloved disciples will be sent, *"so that the world may believe that You sent Me"* (21, 23)

There are suppositions in this prayer's conclusion. The disciples will learn that while Jesus Christ's mission will be accomplished ("finished") that there will be a role for them to play. They won't understand what that role is or what the ongoing mission entails BUT... they will.

The Kingdom is come in Jesus Christ AND the Kingdom is coming. The task of the Apostles and the Church is to call people to believe through the Apostles message. Did the disciples know what was ahead for THEM and for the Jesus-Movement? Not yet... BUT...they will.

I want to look at the inferences in this prayer:

- 1) **The Multitude Anticipated**
- 2) **The Prayer's Ambition/Aim**
- 3) **The Means of Advance**

In praying, first for the disciples and THEN for those who will believe in Jesus through the disciples' word, He's inferring or assuming that there will be a crowd of people who will join the movement.

In making that assumption, Jesus Christ is pointing to a powerful stream of thought and promise running through the whole Hebrew Bible: salvation is FROM the Jews (Jn 4.22) but not meant to stay with the Jews. The people of Abraham are the conduit or pipeline of God's grace and truth to the Gentiles, the nations.

This strong stream of promise like a thread woven through the whole Hebrew Bible is found in places like, the original call of God to Abraham (Gen 12): "*And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.*" (3)

Or Isaiah CH 49 that promises to Israel, God's Servant: "*It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make you a light to the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.*" (6)

In The Second Psalm, the Father invites the Son: "*Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession*" (8) HERE in this prayer, the Son accepts that eternal offer and asks for the nations.

One last example, the *Book of Ezekiel* contains some 70 times that phrase, "*then they will know that I am the Lord*" and we read there this enthralling vision of fresh water dripping from the Temple in Jerusalem. The water represents God's grace, forgiveness, new life and rescue... The drip becomes a little trickle, a flow, a thin spring, a small brook, a modest river of grace and as the prophet follows this river, it widens and increases and becomes a wide and mighty torrent turning all other water fresh and pure. It's a picture of Jesus Christ and His very modest beginnings in Jerusalem (only a very few drippy followers) to this world-wide movement. "The For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea." (Hab. 2.14)

And Jesus Christ picked up that OT thread and drew attention to it in lots of ways. He said:

- The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed which grows into a tree and all the birds nest in its branches (Luke 13.19)
- many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; (Matt. 8.11; John 11.52)

- His limited contact with Gentiles is as if to say, “I have to serve Abraham’s people first... I’ll get to you in a minute!” (John 12.20, 7.35, Mk 7.26; Mt 8.5ff, 15.22 et al)
- There’s the famous Great Commission (Mat 28 et al)

The whole theology of the NT develops this anticipation (see Eph 2.11-3.21) and finally, the last book, the sequel to *John’s Gospel*, *The Revelation*, traces this anticipation to its REALization when it says, “*behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’*” (Rev. 7.9-10)

This is what we mean when we profess that the Church is catholic, that it’s no longer exclusive to one ethnicity AND it’s no longer headquartered in Jerusalem or anywhere else – it’s in every nation. The Apostles had little understanding of this until a great event took place some 50 days after the Resurrection.

The prayer of Jesus Christ, anticipates “*other sheep*” (Jn 10.16)

Second, The Prayer’s Ambition/Aim: this part of Jesus Christ’s prayer centers on two goals: union with God and unity among God’s people (union and unity).

The Father is IN Jesus i.e., if you have seen Jesus Christ, you have seen the clearest representation of God you will ever see on earth. Remember the request put by Phillip, “Lord, show us the Father and we’re good!”

And Jesus answers, “*He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me?*” (Jn. 14.9-10)

And it’s NOT to say that there’s no distinction between the Persons in the Trinity (Remember the “shield of the Trinity” that illustrates *The Athanasian Creed* – the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God AND the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit and the Spirit is not the Father.)

What Jesus Christ is saying is that the Father and Son and Spirit have union. They’re intertwined (as it were) in an eternal dance – the theological word for this is “*Perichoresis*” – that the Persons are in perfect, eternal, harmonious union. The Persons “go around” One Another. Bernard of Clairvaux said, “*The Father is the One who kisses, the Son is the One kissed and the Spirit IS the kiss Himself.*”

The Christian is IN Christ and Christ is IN the Father and the Father is IN Christ. The phrase “IN Christ” may be the most important phrase in the NT. He represents us, and we who believe (and trust in Christ alone to save us and rule us) we were IN Him when He fed the 5,000 and healed the lepers and died on the Cursed Tree to make it the Tree of Life. I was IN Christ when He lived, obeyed, died, rose and when He sat down before the Father.”

The hymn captures this (about the church, it sings): *“Yet she on earth hath union with God, the Three in One, and mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won.”* We’ve been united to the life of God and that LIFE is LOVE. (26) *“So that the love with which You have loved Me may be in them and I in them.”*

AND this union with God in Christ is to be reflected in our love for one another. All believers in Jesus ARE one (regardless of the titles that may separate us) AND we are growing in that unity: (23) *“I in them and You (Father) in Me, that they may be perfected (completed) in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.”*

We grow in the unity we’ve been given: *“being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* (Eph. 4.3)

I know there are *professing* Christians who, by their actions or beliefs, have really abandoned the faith and “apostolic Christianity” – *“those also who believe in Me through THEIR word.”* Some people identify as Christians who deny cardinal, Apostles’ Creed generic-Christianity. With such people we can NOT have unity but we CAN dialogue with them and try to bring them to the Christ taught by the Apostles. (1Cor 8.5)

On the other hand, other professing Christians, won’t hang around YOU because you wear jewelry or use zippers on your clothing or dance or drink alcohol.

My own rule of thumb is to cooperate with people to the degree that I can. Muslims (who aren’t Christians at all) agree that kids should be able to pray in school – I can agree with that... BUT... I wouldn’t want a Muslim (with all due respect) to teach my children how to pray.

And people who DO profess faith in Christ – I should try to cooperate with them to the degree that I can, giving the benefit of the doubt. Sometimes we can only agree on what we oppose... so do THAT.

A friend of mine asked me how I could even maintain faith in Jesus Christ when there were so many sects and denominations and disunity and he said, “You Christians can’t even agree on what Christianity IS!”

I told him that all religions teach people how to get to God but Christianity, properly understood, teaches how God came to us. All religion is built on karma but Christianity is based on grace. St. Paul wrote: *“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”* (2 Cor. 5.19)

If you’re good with that, then we have a basis for unity and love and we can go from there... If you're Baptist, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, Greek Orthodox or Episcopalian and you believe in who Jesus Christ IS and what He did to bring us forgiveness and new life and that we receive it by simple TRUST/believing, then I’m going to think of you as a brother or sister until you prove me wrong. Jesus prayed for unity.

Lastly, The Means of the Advance - Jesus leaves us in the world (as He was in the world) and NOT as orphans and He sends us into our neighborhoods and work-places, our cities and nations with an assignment.

It has two means for completion. We are a link in a chain (a succession). We use the words of the Apostles to call people to believe. He prayed, *"I do not ask on behalf of these (disciples) alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word"* (20) Believing is the goal and the Apostles message (Gospel) is the means. The church does a lot of stuff but it comes down to that – telling the message, urging people to believe.

And, out of the grace WE receive BY FAITH (grace is received by faith – Gal. 3.1-5) the Holy Spirit enables us to LOVE. God is love. God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit LOVE... the love of God is eternal. There was NEVER a time when there was no love... and that love emanating from the Trinity has found us out.

And when the world sees DIVINE LOVE, sees people like we, giving ourselves to one another, despite many differences but dying to self (as Jesus Christ did for us) and our dying (giving up conveniences, time, money, attention, time, effort and time!) for one another – it makes the Truth we speak refreshing.

By this will people know that we are Christ's disciples: by the way we love one another (Jn 13.35).