

For three years Jesus went around proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. He spoke continually about how God was going to make it possible for man to get back into relationship with him. Jesus said he was the Son of God. He said he had authority over everything in creation. And to give proof of this he revealed his power – he turned water into wine; he multiplied loaves and fishes to feed thousands of people; he calmed the sea with just a word – wind and waves obeyed; he walked on water; and everywhere he went he healed people of their illnesses and diseases; he even raised from the dead. Not a bad CV!

But a crucial part of his life as a man for those 33 years, was the time he spent away from the crowds, away from all the attention. Luke tells us in his gospel, *'The news about him spread all the more, so that crowds came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.'*

Luke 5:15, 16. Jesus needed time on his own. He needed time to pray. He needed time on his own praying to God the Father. He went away often to pray because his relationship with God the Father was vital. The close relationship he enjoyed was so vitally important to his ministry.

What about us? Do you pray? When do you pray? Do you just pray when you want something? Do you just pray when you're ill? How do you pray? Very briefly? Believing that your prayers don't go any further than the 4 walls you're in?

Or do you come away from everyone, shut yourself off from the world, give voice to your relationship with God, your vital, living relationship with God? This is the prayer that God wants to hear – prayer that gives expression to our relationship with him. Jesus needed to do that, how much more do we need to do that.

Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

But this evening I want to look at part of a prayer Jesus offered in public, so that everyone in the whole world through all generations would be able to read it. Turn with me to John's gospel 17 [Read 17:1 - 5, 20 - 26.]

For **starters**, let's look quickly at three questions – When? Who? And Why?

When did this prayer happen in the order of events?

Well these are the last days of Jesus' earthly ministry – his work on earth is coming to an end. He says in Luke 19:10, *'The Son of Man [a name he gave himself] came to seek and to save what was lost.'*

The purpose of his being born as a man – to seek and save the lost - is reaching its climax, and he's preparing the people around him for it.

In the previous chapters he's been preparing his disciples for his departure, he's introduced the Lord's Supper so that they can remember him 'This do in remembrance of me'. He's given his disciples signs of his work and that he needs to go to the cross and return to Father. And in chapter 16:30, the disciples say this makes them believe Jesus came from God and Jesus says, '*You believe at last!*' Although Jesus knows their faith isn't perfect – he knows they're going to desert him soon after this – perhaps it's a relief to Jesus that they're at this stage of faith. Some of their misunderstandings at least have been cleared up.

Beginning with this prayer in chapter 17, we see Jesus now preparing for things to come – his arrest in chapter 18, his trial and the cross in chapter 19. Within this prayer, Jesus prays for himself in the work to be achieved on the cross; he prays for his disciples and then – in the section we read just now – he prays for all who were to believe in him as a result of the cross and his subsequent resurrection.

Who is it praying here? **Who** is Jesus? [Read Colossians 1:15-20]

He's the Son of God, and through him everything was created. He's the Saviour of mankind, he's the one who came to give his life as a ransom for many.

Do you sense the enormity of what's happening here? Jesus – the eternal Son of God, with God the Father before the world began (17:24) there from eternity, One with the Father, co-equal - no less God because he's the Son, co-eternal – he's **always** shared the glory with the Father. He was loved by the Father before the creation of the world. This Jesus is praying for **you**.

How does that make you feel? Good? Surely we should all feel **great!**

Jesus, the radiance of the Father's glory, it says in Hebrews. This same Jesus prays here for **you**, for all of us who're already Christians and for those listening to God's word, being drawn by God into his kingdom, yet to become believers. He's praying for **you**.

How have you come here this evening? Cold? Depressed? Dull? Lost that spark? Let Jesus thrill your heart now through this prayer.

Hebrews 7:25 tells us that Jesus '*is able to save completely those that come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.*' – he's praying for you now.

If you're a believer, then Jesus prays this prayer for you. If you're not a believer **yet**, then Jesus' prayer – and **my** prayer - is that God will draw you to himself, that you will become a believer. If you hear his voice speaking to you tonight, don't walk away from him, accept his love, turn to him and be saved. Jesus, eternal Son of the Almighty God is praying for you.

Why? Why should we think about this prayer this evening?

We are encouraged to pray according to God's will – John says in his first letter, *'if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.'* 1 John 5:14. Well, if there's anyone who's completely in tune with God's will, it **has** to be the Son of God, Jesus. Surely he's praying for these things according to the will of his Father in heaven, that's why he came, *'to do the will of him who sent me'*, he said – the will of God the Father is what concerns Jesus most, so surely Jesus' prayer **will** be answered.

We often pray 'if it can be your will' – there's none of that here. We qualify **our** requests because we're not always sure what God's will for us **is**. **Jesus** doesn't **need** to qualify his requests – he **knows** the mind of his Father in heaven. Jesus prays for these things **knowing** they're of paramount importance for his people, his body, the church. So I think that we can assume that the things he talks about **here** in this prayer are what he **purposes** for his people.

We should think about this prayer because it contains the will of God for his church, the purposes of God for his church.

This prayer is jam-packed with material to be thought about and meditated upon. There's no way I could cover it all this evening. I found 10 points to bring to you – but before you all look at your watches, I'd better say that I'm only going to cover 3 of them.

I want us to concentrate on this last section of the prayer in verses 20-26, where Jesus prays for all believers. Actually, I only have **one** point with three sections – three in one. And that's my point – **ONE**. That's what I want us to think about – very simple really. The truth of God is simple to those who're ready to receive.

This 3rd section of Jesus' prayer is for all the different kinds of people to come after Jesus' time on earth, all those who would believe in Jesus as Lord and Saviour. The prayer is for oneness, for unity. This is God's will and purpose for his people.

[Read 20-23a]

Firstly then: Jesus prays that God's people are to be **one in him**.

We're thinking about the unity of the church. The unity we experience in our fellowship and with other Christians must have its origins in the unity of God the Father and God the Son. Because **they** are one, **we** can be one. Jesus prays, *'that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.'* (verse 21). Because **they** are inextricably linked in the Trinity – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit - one God in three persons, when **we** are made new creations through new birth, we become inextricably linked to **God**. We're then in Christ. God lives in us through his Spirit. We're adopted into God's family, God becomes our Father in heaven, we're brought into a relationship that cannot be broken, a relationship with God.

Romans 6:5 says *If we have been united with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.* When we become God's children, we're united to Jesus in his death, we're dead to sin, and we'll certainly be united with him in his resurrection. His resurrected life is lived out in us by his Holy Spirit.

Perhaps the clearest picture of how we are one in him, is the picture of the body in 1 Corinthians 12 – I'm sure we all know the analogy without reading it now. It says Christ is our head, the head of the body, and each of the members of his church is a member of his body, different in purpose, but all members of the same body. We're joined to Jesus in a vital way – not a nominal or a loose way. A living connection is essential, we're to be connected permanently. The parts of my body aren't stuck on with blu-tac, that when things get too hot it dries up and the parts drop off. Permanently and vitally connected. In Christ. In Christ for a purpose. In Christ forever.

And this unity is nothing of my doing – no aspect of my relationship with God is down to me. My union with Jesus is nothing of me – it's a work of God, of his Holy Spirit convincing me that this is the only way to enjoy a relationship with God. It's all because of Jesus – it doesn't depend on anything that I am or anything I've done. It's all down to God, down to Jesus, down to his Holy Spirit. [expand?] And so because it's nothing of me, once the power of God has joined me to him – the same power that raised Jesus from the dead – once this power has joined me to him, nothing can separate me from him.

God's done it all. Jesus made a way back to God possible. Jesus gave us the opportunity to have a relationship with God. As he died on the cross, he cried out 'It's finished!' He did everything that was needed for us to be able to be made right with God. Do you recognise that? Do you accept that only believing what Jesus has done can save us? We need to cast ourselves on his mercy. Cry to him tonight. Accept what Jesus wants to give – that's what he died and rose again for. 4

God is perfect in every way, he's a God of perfection in every area, and so Jesus prays for our **complete** unity in verse 23, for **perfect** unity. Not a lukewarm unity, not a unity that's hanging on by a tiny thread, but complete unity – all our heart, mind, spirit and soul should be vitally linked with the Lord Jesus.

When I was a boy I used to be introduced as Jessie and Bernard's little lad; through school and university I was Andrew's friend, Gary's friend, Mike's friend; I got married and was known as Wendy's husband; Peter came along and I became Peter's dad. I praise God, that there's none of that with God – he doesn't know me because of the family and friends I have – God knows **me**, **I** am united to God. God has chosen to have unity with each one of us because of his love and mercy.

Paul writes in Philippians 2:1, *If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, ... then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.* Our unity with Jesus should give us encouragement and should result in us being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Spirit, purpose and love – which leads onto my second 'one' ...

[Read verses 23 and 26]

Jesus prays that God's people are to be **one in love**.

In the world we're constantly hearing about division and isolation: Britain isolated from the rest of Europe; diplomatic relationships with Syria broken off; countries all over the world at war; leaders suspicious of other leaders and falling out; at the workplace people suspicious of the motives of others as they look for favour and promotion; the rich/poor divide etc etc.

Right at the beginning of God's word, in Genesis 2:18, we read that *'God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone."* There is no room for isolation in God's plan for his church. We're to be **one** – **all** of us. The Psalmist says in Psalm 133 *'How good and pleasant it is when brothers (and sisters?) live together in unity'* We're **meant** to be together as one.

Well, how is the body to be held **together**? The skin that wraps together the members of the body of Christ is love. We're one in love.

The Greek word for fellowship – 'koinonia' – means 'sharing something with someone'; the Latin equivalent is 'communio', where we get the word 'communion' from, of course – the meal we share to remember the Lord's great love and sacrifice for us.

What motivates our fellowship and being together? Is it the warm comfortable feeling? Is it the coffee and biscuits? Or is it real genuine love for each other? We should be one in love, according to verse 23 here, *‘to let the world know that you have loved them even as you have loved me.’* The purpose of our unity in love is so that others will believe that God has sent Jesus, and that God has loved and does love his people. They’ll know we are Christians by our love.

What motivates what we do and say concerning the church? Can you say ‘everything I do and say is motivated by love?’ Do I really want to love the **whole** of Christ’s body? Am I sure there isn’t just the slightest hint of self-interest there? I find in the world nowadays that there are so many clever people bringing other people down, discouraging, being negative – some of those attitudes can creep into the church if we’re not careful. We must think ‘Jesus prays for our unity – am I doing or saying these things with a desire for unity? Am I unifying or causing divisions?’

Paul writes, *‘My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.’* Colossians 2:2. Our being united in love has the result that we will have the full riches of complete understanding, so that we may know the mystery of God, that is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Mind-blowing words. Bigger than our little brains can take in.

This implies of course, that if we’re **not** united in him and in love, we can never know the riches and treasures of wisdom and knowledge. How can we afford not to be one in him and in love? Who would want to miss out on these riches and treasures? Why would anyone not want to experience all the blessings in heaven that God has to give? I know I don’t want to miss anything of what God is willing to give. God is love – if we’re in him, we’re in his love. One in love.

We’re not talking about earthly love here, not love that depends upon our ability to love – our love is so weak, so fickle, so vulnerable, so changeable. No this is **God’s** love, the same love he has for Jesus, we’re told. Such great love – the love God the Father has had for Jesus, God the Son – from eternity to eternity.

If God’s love is in you, you won’t be able to say, ‘I’ll love him, but not **him** – he’s not very lovable.’ If the love of God is in you – the same love he has for Jesus – you can love anyone and everyone.

Now shouldn't this oneness in love transform our fellowship? Loving each other sacrificially, welcoming everyone we meet, everyone who walks through that door. Then the world will know that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.

One in him. One in love.

[Read verse 24]

Jesus prays that God's people are to be **one in glory for eternity**.

The best is yet to come! Jesus wants us to be with him where he is – glorified, present with God, seated at the right hand of the Father, reigning on high! He wants us to share in that glory, for eternity. This will be the ultimate unity, our unity in this life can't be anything like that unity of believers with God in heaven at the end of this life.

In Ephesians 1:9 we read, '*And he [God] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.*' Our personal salvation in this life is wonderful enough, but the ultimate purpose of God for us is much greater. For all things to be united under one head, even Christ. When God calls time on this present world, those who believe will be united together with Jesus in heaven.

We look around and see the turmoil around us and we're saddened by it. But as we look at the present situation, we can in one sense remain calm, because God's perfect plan of unity is absolutely certain, it can't be shaken. His plan is for complete harmony, unity in eternity. This can never be undone. We're called to look to the ultimate, to look to eternity, to look forward to the perfect harmony which Isaiah talks about when he says the sound of weeping and crying will be no more, when the wolf and the lamb will feed together, the lion will eat straw like the ox.

Nothing shall separate the believer either now or in eternity from the love of God in Christ Jesus, and one day we'll be united in glory – that surely is something to look forward to, and puts all that we are and experience *now* into its right perspective.

The prayer of Psalm 27:4 is this, '*that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord.*' Do we look forward to that time when we can gaze on the beauty of the Lord forever? Are we anticipating that ultimate and final unity with God in glory, for eternity?

One in him. One in love. One in glory for eternity.

Do you know anything of this oneness? Are you one with God? Are you experiencing anything of the wonderful relationship that God promised to all who believe in him through the work of Jesus? This is **Jesus'** prayer to God the Father. This is what Jesus wants , this is what **God** wants for you. This offer is open to all who will believe that Jesus is the Son of God; that he came to die on the cross to pay the price for our sins, for us to be made free from the guilt of our sins; that he rose again and is now this very moment praying for us. Do you believe? Be reconciled to God. Be united to God, in Christ, in love, in glory for eternity.

John 17:20-26 One

1 Starters:

- When?
- Who?
- And Why?

2. One in Him (v. 20-23a)

3. One in love (v. 23b, 26)

4. One in glory for eternity (v. 24)