

# **John 17:20-26**

## **“Jesus Prays for the Church”**

### **Introduction:**

Last month I had the opportunity to officiate two weddings. In my preparation leading up to the weddings I began to think about the day that Anna and I got married. Each of the three weddings were different in some ways and similar in others. One way we were similar is that we all used a unity illustration. The first wedding I officiated in March did a unity braid. In the unity braid illustration you take three separate ropes and cross them over one another like a lady would braid her hair. The second wedding I did had unity candles. In this illustration there would be three candles lined side by side with two lit on the outside. The couple would take the two lit candles and bring them together over the middle candle and light it. In our wedding Anna and I had a unity cross with three nails. Each of us put a nail on the side that we stood on and then together, we put the third nail through the top of the cross. Though each of these illustrations were different in that one was with rope, one with candles, and another with a cross, they all represented one thing: Unity.

The purpose of performing these moments is to illustrate to the witnesses that the bride and the groom are coming together as one. After our illustration of unity was over we turned to leave the church. On that day when we left our ceremony Anna was no longer a McCrory but now she was a Killion. I gained a new family that day with the Hill/Mccrory family. But Anna's name changed; her identity changed. She needed a new passport and driver's license to show that she was no longer a Mccrory. By marrying me she was also given a new family and she was

given access to all my family had to offer. One thing that each of us gained from our union, is love from each other's family.

In the same way, we know that marriage is really a representation of our relationship with Christ. We the church are the bride of Christ; who is the groom. When we have been saved we are locked into the union of love with Christ and as we enter into that relationship we are given access to be loved by the Father. We are given access to know and enjoy Jesus as our groom and all that His family has to offer. In John 17:20-26 Jesus shifts His prayer from the disciples and towards the future church (which again, is His bride) and in His prayer He asks the Father that the church, His future family, would have access to perfect unity, glory, and success in missions.

### **1. Jesus prays for unity in His future church. (v.20-23)**

The first thing to point out is the confidence of the prayer of Christ. He begins this shift by saying, “I do not ask for these only [His disciples], but also for those who will believe in me through their word...” Notice how Jesus’ prayer for the world is future tense. He knows others besides the disciples will in fact believe. He is confident in His ministry and actions and trust in the Father’s plan of multiplying followers through His disciples. From this confidence Christ prayed for three aspects of the church:

#### **1. That they may all be one together**

The first request Jesus makes to the Father for the future church is that they would be unified just like He and God the Father are unified. Meaning that Jesus desires that their will for the

advancement of the good news of Christ would be unified in mission and vision. If you remember last week Andrew said that God the Father and God the Son “shared vision and unity of glory and [that] we are given insight into the perfect unity, will, and mission of the Father and Son which results in their glory and our good in eternal life.” God’s intention for giving us the insight of His will is so the church would come together under the same mission to reach all those who “will believe in [Jesus].

## **2. That they may be one in God**

The second request is for the future Church to have unity with the Father through the Son. In this request we see Jesus praying for His future mediation. This being His final discourse you may recall other areas that Jesus has prophesied about his mediation. Two that stick out through these final days with the disciples is John 14:6 when Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” And the second is John 15 when Jesus says, “I am the vine and my Father is the vine dresser.” This means that Jesus is our source of life that gives us access to be pruned (or sanctified) by the Father.

I believe it is important for us to understand that (v.21) doesn’t happen apart from the centrality of Christ. There is no unity of the church or access to the Father or filling of the Holy Spirit apart from Christ work on the cross and His resurrection. In this portion of the prayer Jesus is unveiling to His disciples and now to us that He stands in the gap for us and is the link that unifies us to the Father who sanctifies and glorifies us. In order for us to be unified as a body we must be unified with God and when we are unified to the Trinity then we will be able to better

fulfill Christ's last request in (v.21) which is that the world would believe that the Father sent the Son.

### **3. That the world may believe that the Father sent the Son**

You will notice quickly in this prayer who Jesus believes carries out the good news of Himself to the world: It is His church.

Notice he doesn't say, "Father, be with Peter as he goes out and shares the gospel with his friends. And be with the other disciples as they eat breakfast and fellowship."

He doesn't say, "Father, be with the extroverts in the future church and give them confidence to share your word."

Instead He says, I pray for "those who will believe... so that the world may believe you have sent me."

The burden and joy of the mission of God to save the world in Jesus' prayer does not fall on individuals alone but on the whole body of Christ.

We are to be unified with one another in the same mission and vision of God in order to teach and tell the world that Christ is the Son of God.

We can accomplish this unity by relying on the Holy Spirit. In 1 John 4:13 he says, "We know that we abide in Him and He in us because he has given us of His Spirit." Likewise Jesus told

His disciple in John 16:13, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...”

This is the truth church, those who are guided by the Spirit abide in love with God and with one another. And those who have the Spirit and abide in love for the things of God also abide in love for the mission of God.

**Illustration:**

Before every football season started when I played at Holmes our head coach would call the team together and give us a speech about team unity. After the speech he gave us all a sticker and a shirt. Both the sticker and the shirt had a word that we used as an acronym— it was the word APIS. The sticker went on the front of our helmet and we wore the shirt during team workouts. The acronym stood for **All Players In Sync**. He got the acronym from the latin word Apis Mellifera which means honey-bearing bees.

You may not know this but there are over 20,000 species of bee in the world and only one makes honey. The purpose for making honey is so that the bees in the beehive can survive throughout the winter. So once spring comes all the bees come together to make honey in order to prepare the Hive for next winter. In order for them to accomplish this goal all the bees of the hive would have to fulfill its role and accomplish the task they have been sent out to do.

Our coach used this illustration to teach us that in order for us to reach our goal and win a championship we would have to be like the honey bee and work together in unity—we would need to have APIS— **All Players In Sync**.

Jesus in His prayer is praying for the church to have APIS. That is to say that Jesus is praying that the future believers who make up His church would be unified towards the goal of telling the world about that good news and story of Himself in order that they may believe in Him as the Son of God who came to take the sins of the world.

### **Application:**

The point of the illustration is this: the bees were unified in their mission to produce and make honey for the hive. Our team was unified in our effort to win a championship. In the same way, we as a church have a role to play in the mission of God and each of us are a part of accomplishing that mission. In order for us to do that we must understand that calling people to know and worship Jesus is most effective when the body of Christ is most unified in truth. (Not acceptance, but truth)

The apostle Paul teaches in Ephesians how we can apply unity within our midst.

### **Six Marks of a unified Church according to Ephesians 4**

1. A unified church agrees in **Doctrine**. (Ephesians 4:4-6)
2. A unified church is well **equipped**. (Ephesians 4:11-13)
3. A unified church is filled with **regenerate members**. (Ephesians 4:23-24)

4. A unified church has **accountability**. (Ephesians 4:25)
5. A unified church has **encouragement**. (Ephesians 4:29)
6. A unified church is filled with **love**. (Ephesians 4:31-32)

The church that is marked with these characteristics of unity is a church who teaches the world corporately and individually that we belong to Christ. In John 13:35 Jesus says, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” If we paraphrased Jesus in this verse we could say, “By this people will know that you are my disciples, if you are unified in love.”

As we observe the marks of unity in the church we can each see parts that each of us individually need to examine and work out for the unity of the body.

1. **Doctrine:** You can know and learn what we believe in a broad sense by reading the Baptist Faith and Message 2000.
2. **Equipped:** You can be equipped through the application of the word being taught on Sunday in service or Sunday school or join us for a book study on Wednesday night. You can stop by our office in the afternoons or meet with a pastor on staff at breakfast, lunch, or at your kids' tee ball game and allow us to equip you with tools for the work of ministry in your home, work place, or mission field.

3. **Accountability:** When God created His church He created her to stand on truth and grace. Truth confronts lies like light confronts darkness. If we want to be unified in Christ then we cannot accept our sin or the sin of other members in our midst. Rather we must share the truth with them in love and call them to repentance for their good and the purity and unity of the church.
4. **Encouragement:** Out of all the things listed for unity this ought to come most natural to the Christian. Encouragement can be as small as acknowledging someone's presence or as big as writing them a letter of thanksgiving and gratitude. We ought to be a people who say I love you, I need you, I miss you, and I appreciate you to one another often.
5. **Love:** A church will be known most in Christ by their love for one another. We can share love with one another when we apply each of the marks of unity together and submit to Jesus as our first love. (Revelation 2:4)

According to Jesus prayer in (v.22-23) we can accomplish this unity here on earth because he has given us His glory. In other words,

**We are conduits (or vessels that convey) the glory of God (22-23)**

Last week Andrew spent some time talking about the “mutual giving of glory” between the Father and the Son. He said,



“Jesus' resurrection is the return of all the greatness, splendor, and majesty to God the Son and in turn God the Son reflects all the greatness, splendor, and majesty of God the Father and offers eternal life to mankind who can have a relationship with the Father.”

Now, as Christ shifts His prayer from the disciples to all future believers He says, “I am giving the glory you gave me to them.” This glory that has been given is applied to believers when we receive the Holy Spirit. The glory that we have is not received on the merit of a man but given by God's grace for God's glory. One commentator wrote about the church receiving God's Spirit and said that it “bears the call of God to the World, because it is the manifestation of the love and glory of God in the world.”

Therefore, for all who have received this glory by Christ you have received along with it a mission to reflect the character of God individually, to make known the story of Christ universally, and to be unified in the Spirit corporately. This means that whether we are at home with our spouse and kids or at work we are to display the character of God in our conduct and interactions with others. We are to be ready to tell the people around us about the story and good news of Jesus Christ and invite them into a relationship with Him. We have to realize that we need the Spirit for the character of God to be shown, the mission of God to be effective, and the unity of the church to be pure.

Christ says in His prayer that we have been given this glory (v.23) “that we may become perfectly one”—for what purpose?— so that the world may know that Jesus has been sent and that the love of God through Christ may be displayed to all the world.

Church, in His prayer Christ is confident that perfect unity among us leads to the salvation of the nations.

**Application:**

That means that when we function under the wisdom and guidance of the Spirit our work for the LORD is not meaningless. We can go forward in confidence sharing the good news of Jesus with our “One” because Christ in his prayer is convinced that our unity as a body will lead to the salvation of our ones. So let me ask you, is the life you are living in the midst of this gathering planting seeds of unity or seeds of disunity? Do you have sin that is hindering you from being brought into this union that we have entered into with one another? Do you love and adore the community of God’s people? What are you promoting as a member of this body?

Church, Christ’s confidence in this passage teaches us that a church that is not unified in love will not be blessed in missions. So I call you once again to observe your heart and ask the Lord to reveal to you where you might be sowing seeds of disunity so that we may grow in perfect unity together for the sake of others knowing Jesus.

**2. Jesus prays to be with His future church. (v.24-26)**

**A. Jesus longs to be with the church in glory. (v.24)**

Let's not rush past v.24... Jesus prays, "Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me, may be with me where I am..." Brother and sister in Christ, Jesus desires to be with you. He looks forward to the day of His return with joy. He is eagerly awaiting for the Father to send Him to bring full restoration and glory to His church.

**Illustration:**

I can remember mine and Anna's wedding when all the bridesmaids began walking down the aisle as me and the groomsmen waited at the altar. As each bridesmaid walked by my eagerness and desire to see my bride grew more and more. I remember feeling like they were taking forever to get in their spots but then the doors behind them shut and Anna took her fathers hand. There was about 5 or 10 seconds between the moment the doors shut and the moment they opened it again. I can remember thinking, "This is it! This. is. it!" I longed to see her in her white dress walking down the aisle for us to be together for life.

In the same way Jesus in great anticipation is thinking of the moment when he gets to see His future Bride, the church, fully sanctified and dressed in fine linen. He longs to see us and church, we should long to see Him.

The rest of v.24 says that Jesus desires to see us 1. Because he wants us in his presence but 2. So that we could see him in all His glory.

Now, when the doors on my wedding day opened I saw the most beautiful bride in history. I cannot say she saw the most handsome husband. But church on this day when we meet Christ we

will not be the most stunning site of all— Christ will be. We will see Him for who he really is in all His authority, splendor, and glory.

It reminds me of an old southern gospel song that says,

"You won't find Him again at the whipping post standing there so meek  
And He won't be nailed to a rugged cross through His hands  
And through his feet  
There will never be another Calvary cause He doesn't have to prove one thing  
That day the Lamb became the Lion and the Lion became the King."

**Application:**

What a day that will be! Christ desires to be with us because He loves us. May we be a people who share the same love and eagerness to see Christ in all His glory.

**B. Jesus longs to be with the church in mission. (v.25-26)**

As Jesus concludes His prayer he unveils his heart for the world by committing to be with His people as they contend for the faith through the great commission. V.25 teaches that though the world does not know Christ as the Son of God; Jesus knows He is the Son and He has made Himself known to His disciples. And v.26 shares with us that Christ desires to continue the mission of making Himself known to them as well as to the future believers. This makes sense

when we compare it to Matthew 28 when Jesus says, "Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." He even tells the Father that he will continue to be with us in order that the love that God the Father has for the Son may be known by all who would receive Him.

Let that promise of Christ being with you comfort you as you consider telling your One about Jesus. What Jesus is declaring to the Father in these last two verses is a confidence that the mission of God cannot fail because Christ's work in this final hour will succeed. Christ is confident that He will be resurrected from the dead and He is confident that His great commission plan will be fulfilled because He will be with us through the giving of His Spirit. The power of hell will not prevail. The mission of God will succeed in and through His people because He has given us Himself as the assurance of our success.

### **Call to Action:**

The prayer of Jesus is still being answered today in that more people will believe in Him for salvation. If you find yourself in a place where you are not sure where you stand with Christ or you know that you have been far from Him because of sin then I encourage you to find me or Andrew after the service. We would love to talk to you about what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Maybe you were invited to church—I would encourage you to speak to the person who invited you and ask them questions about who Christ is and why He cares about seeing lost people saved.

Church based on Christ's prayer for future believers—which includes us in this room today— I urge you to set aside any personal sin or weight that is breeding disunity in our midst and fight for unity with one another in love. Let us commit ourselves to being a people who are unified in Christ and who eagerly seek His glory daily. Let us stand in truth and walk in grace. Let us anticipate the 2nd coming of our resurrected King. And let us boldly and unashamedly commit to extending our One's the same love that was extended to us in Christ. Let us unashamedly tell them the story of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Let us point those who are close to us but far from God to the one who bridged the gap and mediates on our behalf. Let's be what Christ has prayed to the Father for us to be— a unified body filled with love for God and love for people.