

October 3/4, 2020

Why Unity Matters

These Things are Written that You May Believe Series

John 17: 1-26

Pastor Bryan Clark

Last week we talked about experiencing joy. But there's really no possibility of that, unless you cultivate a right view of God. So, let's think about that for a minute. Honestly, in your heart of hearts, what is your view of God? Do you see God as like a judge, always waiting to condemn you? Do you see God as an angry parent always ready to scold you? Do you see God as a referee that's always waiting for you to break the rules, to throw the flag on you? Maybe you see God as like a genie in a bottle, and He sits on a shelf. He's there when you need Him; you'll pull Him down and rub the lamp.

Well, let me offer you this. Let's imagine a world where there is so much chaos and so much anger and so much hatred and so much irrational thinking. And in the midst of all of the fear and the chaos of that, imagine right in the middle of it, there's this dome—kind of like a snow globe—and inside is the quietness of the country. And there is this little girl spending a day with her daddy. And they run together. And they play together. And they adventure together. And they sing together. It's this beautiful day, and this little girl just treasures this most wondrous, delightful day with her daddy. It's a day that actually seems almost magical. What if it was like that with God?

Well, that's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to the Gospel of John, Chapter 17. Jesus is officially done with His teaching ministry to the disciples. The previous materials, referred to as the farewell discourse, have officially come to an end. Chapter 17 isn't teaching but rather it's a prayer. As Jesus prays—I'm sure out loud with His disciples present—He prays for them, and He actually even prays for us today. Some people refer to this as Jesus' *High Priestly Prayer*. As a matter of fact, a lot of Bibles, including mine, have that as the paragraph heading. But there's a lot of conversation as to whether that's correct or the best way to view this prayer. My concern with that language is most people, when they hear that, think it some sort of a formal religious prayer—and that's absolutely not what it is. This is Jesus, hours before He's to be arrested. He loves His disciples. It's an intimate conversation with the Father, as Jesus shares His concerns and His thoughts with the Father, as it relates to His disciples and other believers to come.

When you read through this prayer, it can get really confusing. The language feels like it goes in circles. You come out of a paragraph, and it's like, “I don't even know what that just said.” I'm not going to try to dissect every word or phrase. I just want us to get the big idea, the heartbeat of what Jesus is feeling, what He's asking for—what He's intimately discussing with the Father. One of the unique things about this prayer is there are several places where Jesus will pray as if He's already gone to the cross, already resurrected, and is ascending to the Father. In other words, it's as good as done in the mind of Jesus and He's praying for His disciples and what will come after that. So, chapter 17, verse 1:

Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.” (*NASB, John 17:1-5)

There are a couple of significant parts of that opening paragraph. First of all, the use of the word **glory** or **glorify** is an important concept in this prayer. It comes up again, and again, and again. The term means something like *to enhance one's reputation*. So, *to glorify God* would be *to enhance God's reputation*. But what also comes with it is this idea of celebration. It's celebrating God for who He is as a part of enhancing that reputation. So, what Jesus just said is that He is celebrating the Father because of who the Father is. Because the Father has a heart of kindness and compassion and mercy and forgiveness, the vision of the Father is to make it possible for sinful men and women to somehow experience forgiveness and once again experience relationship with Him. That was the original vision of the Father. We rebelled and sinned against God. We've made a mess of it but because of who the Father is—and this is what Jesus is celebrating—He's so merciful and gracious and loving and kind, that He longs to see sinful men and women enter back into that relationship with Him. On the other hand, the Father is glorifying or celebrating the Son because the Son is obedient to the Father in His willingness to take on human flesh, to come to earth, to die on a cross, in order to make it possible for the Father's vision to become a reality. So that's what He means when *He is glorifying the Father and asking the Father to glorify Him*. At the end of all this, according to Jesus, is that we, as sinful men and women, might experience forgiveness which allows us to enter into a relationship with God and experience eternal life. **This is eternal life that we might know God.** The word **know** there does not mean *know about*. It's a term of intimacy. It's the same term used to describe sexual relations between a husband and a wife. It's the idea that we might know God in a real and intimate and experiential way. All of that in that paragraph kind of reminds us of a conversation we've had many times, and that is that before God created, there was just God. *In the beginning, God*. So God dwelt alone, but He wasn't really alone. God dwelt in relationship—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And what defined that relationship was this celebrating of the Father for the Son, the Son for the Spirit, the Spirit for the Father. They glorified one another; they celebrated one another. Often theologians have referred to this by a Greek word *perichoresis*, the word from which we get our word *choreography*, and it means *the dance of God*.

Eternal life is not just a duration of life; it's a quality of life. It's the quality of life that has defined God forever—this beautiful relationship of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Essentially we, as people made in the image of God, were created with the capacity to join in the dance. That's the whole point. We were made for that. But because of our sin, we've been separated from God. We feel that deep within our souls. We long for something. We feel that we were made for something more. The Father, though, is committed to that vision. He's so compassionate. He's so kind. He's so forgiving that He desires to somehow make it possible for us to have our sins forgiven. So He sent his Son to die on a cross to make payment for our sins, that we might be forgiven, in order that we once again might dance with God.

I love that language because it breaks us out of that tendency to view eternal life as some sort of a ticket to heaven or some sort of a business transaction. Stop and think about this. Most of the presentations of the gospel that many of us have memorized, primarily talk about the gospel as a way to go to a place. “You don't want to go to hell; that would be terrible. So this is the basis for your ticket to heaven.” But that's not what Jesus is saying. This is not some business transaction where you merely get a ticket to heaven because you don't want to go to hell. This is God's invitation to experience His salvation so that we may dance with God, that we might join in the life that has defined God forever. Jesus is saying He has come. He's been on a mission; He'll accomplish the mission, and then He'll go back to the glory He had with the Father before he came to earth. Verse 6:

“I have manifested (made known) Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me.”
(Vs. 6-8)

So Jesus has said this over and over and over again to the religious leaders. He has come from the Father to deliver a message from the Father—that this is the Father's plan. This is what's true. He has done the works to validate His claim to be God in the flesh. But most have rejected Him. What Jesus is identifying here are these eleven men. They have seen the works; they have heard the words, and they have believed. Now it's true that oftentimes the disciples have been confused; they've been frustrated; they don't quite get it. But what's been consistent is this desire to understand and to believe. What Jesus is saying is these eleven men have believed the words and the works of Jesus, and so Jesus now prays for them. Verse 9:

“I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours; and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are. While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.” (Vs. 9-12)

Now a couple of things there. First of all, **the son of perdition**. Some translations have something like *destined to perdition*. That's a very unfortunate translation. That's not what the word means. It's a reference to Judas. Judas was not *destined* to rebel against God, but rather the word means *characterized*. He was so characterized by his own selfishness, his own self-centeredness, his own evil, that he just could not hear or respond to the words and works of Jesus. Jesus already told us in the Upper Room, it wasn't that Judas was saved and then lost that salvation. He never believed. He was never clean. He never really bought into it.

But these other eleven have believed, and what Jesus prays for them is that the Father would keep them, would guard them, would protect them. Jesus identifies He's leaving. He's out of the world but His disciples are still going to be in the world. So He prays that they be guarded, they be

protected, they be kept. Now, it's very important to understand what Jesus means by that. He doesn't mean that they won't be persecuted. He doesn't mean that they won't be arrested and thrown in prison. He doesn't even mean that they won't ultimately be executed because of their commitment to Jesus. Jesus has already told them the world's going to hate you; the world's going to persecute you. They know that's the way the story is going to go. What Jesus is praying for, when He prays that they be kept or guarded or protected, is that they be protected in God, that they be kept in this relationship all the way to the finish line and into the presence of Jesus. This has been the consistent message of Jesus. Jesus says, "When I was here, I guarded them; I protected them; they're my own. Now I'm leaving, and I'm asking that You keep them guarded and protected no matter what happens to them, all the way to the finish line and deliver them home." That's what Jesus is praying. The other thing I want to comment on is the end of verse 11. When Jesus says;

“ . . .that they may be one even as We are.”

This will come up multiple times in this prayer, this idea that the children of God, the disciples of Jesus, would experience unity that rightly reflects the unity between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We'll talk more about that in just a minute. Verse 13:

“But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify (or set apart) them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.” (Vs. 13-19)

So what is Jesus saying there? He is saying that the disciples have believed the word of Jesus, which comes from the Father. And the word of the Father is truth. But because they have believed the truth, they're no longer of the world. Jesus has told them this before. Because we believe the truth, we no longer fit in the value system of the world.

Last week we talked about experiencing the joy of God, but you will never experience that joy until you finally settle that we, as followers of Jesus, don't fit here. So many Christians are trying to live with one foot in the world and one foot in the kingdom of God. That will never work. It will always be frustrating. So what Jesus is saying is, these eleven believe the truth, and because of that, they no longer fit in this world. He's told them, "The world is going to hate you; the world is going to persecute you; the world is going to reject you." So He sets them aside on a mission. Jesus is returning to the Father. He's already said, "When I was with you, the world hated Me." But now when He goes to the Father, that hatred will be turned on His disciples. Jesus says, "I'm not asking that You take them out of the world, but that You guard them; You protect them; You keep them while they're in the world, because they have a mission.

We talked about this last week. Jesus did not give His disciples a ticket to heaven and say, "Run to the hills and hide. It is going to get rough." Rather He said, "I'm sending you on a mission. You've been set apart to deliver this life-changing message of Jesus, and I'm asking the Father to

protect you, to keep you safe as you head out on your mission.” He prays that the Father would keep them from **the evil one**. Jesus, in John chapter eight, defines the evil one as the *liar*. He's the father of lies. He's the deceiver. The greatest risk that every one of us experiences on a daily basis is not a virus. It's a liar, and the liar bombards you with lies every single day. And if you listen, if you're deceived, if you believe, he can make your life miserable. So that's what Jesus is praying. “Keep them from that. Set them apart in the truth, because it's the truth that will set them free.”

In verse 19 when Jesus says, “**I sanctify Myself**,” the word **sanctify** means *set apart*. Jesus is saying, “This is a part of the vision of the Father that I, as the eternal Son of God, would set Myself apart to take on human flesh and to go to a cross to make payment for sin, that you might have a relationship with the Father.” Jesus is saying, “That's what I've set myself apart for, for you! And I'm asking you to set yourself apart to tell others this is what I've done for them.” Starting then in verse 20, the focus shifts to where Jesus is now actually praying for us today.

“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;” (Vs. 20)

Jesus has confidence that His disciples will go and they will proclaim the word, and others will be saved. And those people will tell others...and those people will tell others...and the message will spread around the world, so that two thousand years later, there would be people in Lincoln, Nebraska, that would hear the message and choose to believe. It would be very interesting, if this were possible, to trace whoever it was that shared the gospel of Jesus with you back to who shared it with them...who shared it with them. It would all go back to one of these eleven disciples. So Jesus now is praying for us who have come to believe. Verse 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.”

So again this emphasis is on unity, and this unity is going to be what convinces the world around us that the message of Jesus is true. Now, this whole idea of unity is very interesting to think about because what Jesus is not saying is that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, are the model for unity and therefore we should copy that example. Rather, what He's saying is much more than that. What He's saying is, “Yes, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit dwell together in beautiful unity and have done so forever. But now, as a result of Jesus, you have been invited to join in the dance—and we do so together.” It's not just that that's the example; copy the example. It's that we're actually part of the dance; we're part of the life. Part of what Jesus is saying is, “Listen, you've been invited into the most amazing experience possible, but I did not invite you to join the dance so you could create conflict here. I invited you to join the dance so you experience this, not only with God, but together with one another. And that will be so unique in the world that it will be what others look at and say, ‘I don't know what those people have, but I want that.’”

I'm not sure there's ever been a time in my lifetime where the opportunity for the light of Jesus to shine more brightly has been than the days in which we live right now. We need to stop complaining about all this stuff and focus our attention on shining the light of Jesus into a dark world while the world is full of anger, of violence, of despair, hatred, and confusion, while the world is pushing toward isolation, which I think is just going to get worse, and worse, and worse.

There's got to be a light in the middle of the darkness that calls people together to live in community, to love one another, and to care about one another, to have compassion for one another, to at least create a glimpse of the world as God intended it to be. Jesus is not saying to go out there and try harder; I think you can do it. He's saying, "I'm inviting you to join Me. Let's dance together, but when we dance together, let's understand what this means—that we live that way, and experience a unity among the children of God, that will be our light in the world. That's what Jesus is praying for. Verse 22:

The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; 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. 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. (Vs. 22-24)

He repeats what He prayed before. I in the Father; the Father in Me; them in Me; Me in them. We're doing this together. There is nowhere where the New Testament teaches this idea of the individual Christian with his or her ticket to heaven riding off into the sunset alone with Jesus. That concept does not appear anywhere. Jesus' prayer is so clear. It's the Father in the Son; the Son in the Father; Jesus in us; us in Jesus. We dance with Jesus, but we do so together. It's the only option on the table. What He says in verse 24 is really quite remarkable. Jesus has already said, "I go to prepare a place for you. Then I'm going to come back, and I'm going to get you and you're going to be with me forever." What Jesus just prayed to the Father in verse 24 is, essentially, how excited He is for that day when His children join Him in glory, and for the first time, they will see Him in all His glory, and it will be utterly magnificent! As Jesus basically said, "They have seen Me in my incarnation, and they have loved Me. But I can't wait for them to see Me in all My glory." Verse 25:

"O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; 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." (Vs. 25-26)

So, let me kind of do a review of what Jesus is praying. Jesus is essentially saying that He celebrates the Father because of who the Father is, because He's a God of compassion, and kindness, and grace, and forgiveness. And He has this vision that people made in His image would dwell in relationship with Him to experience the life that has defined God forever. But there's a huge problem. We're sinners and our sin separates us from God. So the Son celebrates the Father, but the Father celebrates the Son, that He would be willing to take on human flesh and ultimately be nailed to a cross to make payment for that sin, to make it possible for the Father's vision to be realized, that we might have our sins forgiven and enter into this beautiful dance in the presence of God, both now and forever. But as a result of being invited into the dance, we dance with Jesus as the children of God together, in order that we might experience an unexplainable unity, a bond together that is so unique in the world that it will be what will convince the people around us there's something about these people that's different. "I don't know what it is, but that's what I want."

So think of it like this. Think of a family, kind of like this. Patti and I meet each other. We fall in love; we get married. We love each other, and pretty soon we have children—three lovely daughters. So we not only love each other. We love them and they love us. Much of what they learn about love comes from us. As we love them, they learn to love us. But we want them to also learn to love each other. So I love Patty; Patty loves the girls; the girls love me; the girls love each other; it's just all mixed up. But eventually they grow up. They get married; they have children. They grow up; they get married and pretty soon Patty and my love is a distant memory from the generations that come after that. And as happens in every family, there ends up being brokenness and dysfunction and hurt and pain. It's just part of the story on a sinful earth. What's different about the family of God is there are no layers. Even though it's two thousand years later, my relationship with God doesn't come through layers and layers and layers, and somehow someone explains, "This is God and you should try to imitate God by being unified with one another." There are no layers. Two thousand years later I, too, go directly into the presence of God and experience this beautiful dance with Jesus myself, firsthand, where He teaches me to love. He teaches me to dance. He teaches me to delight, and reminds me, "Hey, you don't just do this with Me; we do this with one another."

Think of the imagery of this little girl with her daddy. Because this is never going to happen—what we've just talked about—unless you first have a right view of God and learn to delight in dance with God. So think of the imagery of this little girl. She trusts her daddy; she loves her daddy; she delights in her daddy, and they're going to spend a day alone out in the country. And they're going to run together, and they're going to play together, and they're going to sing together, and they're going to dance together, and they're going to adventure together. Both of them are going to absolutely delight in this almost magical day together, which I would suggest to you is just a glimpse of the world as God intended it to be, and as it will be, again, one day.

Our Father, we're so thankful that when we were lost in our sin, You sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world, that we might dance with You. But, Lord, we've been reminded when we dance with You, we dance together. We're family. This is what we do. Lord, we celebrate this morning, as Your children, that You are indeed a good, good Father. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988,
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.
Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
Copyright 2020 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.



Fall 2020 // WEEK 4

Life Group Questions

That You May Believe, John // October 3/4, 2020
Why Unity Matters // John 17:1-26

Introduction

Welcome to the fourth week of the Fall 2020 session!

This week we begin to look at what is often referred to as *The High Priestly Prayer* because in it, Jesus prays to the Father on behalf of His disciples. Though the language might seem unfamiliar to you at first, we invite you to hear these words as the disciples heard them during that last night with Jesus before He was crucified – tender words to strengthen and inspire them for difficult times ahead.

Getting to Know Each Other *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

Here are some suggestions to get your conversation started:

1. Think of a nickname you had growing up. Was it something you enjoyed being called or did it make you cringe every time you heard it? Share about the way that name shaped your view of yourself.

2. What is one thing you'd like others to remember about your life?

Getting Started

Begin to transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
 - b. For openness to what you're learning together
 - c. For friendships to deepen and grow

- 2) Invite someone (or a couple of people) to read John 17 to the group.

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

Please complete these questions before your group meets.

- 1) Share a time when you experienced God's care or guidance in your life.

- 2) Verse 3 is the only time when Jesus clearly defines eternal life. **Based on what we've learned in John so far, describe in your own words what Jesus is saying.**

Reflect for a moment on how well you *know* God. **If you're willing, share how you've come to know God the way you do today.**

- 3) As Jesus faces His darkest hours on earth, rather than choosing to be alone with the Father, He prays for and with His disciples. **What can we gain by hearing these intimate words Jesus shares with the Father about His friends?**

- 4) Read verses 20-21 aloud again. Do you notice the phrase that includes you?! **Rewrite those verses, inserting your name where it belongs to personalize the message.**

Share how it made you feel to see and hear your name included in Jesus' prayer.

- 5) Back in John 13:34-35, Jesus clearly stated the value of unity among His followers – the message of the gospel hinges on how the world sees us love each other. **Where do you see the theme of unity repeated in this week’s passage? How easy is it for you to love other believers these days?**

What does John 17:26 make clear to us about our capacity to love others, even in the most difficult circumstances?

Prayer *(Suggested time: 10 min)*

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request, considering how others might pray for you specifically this week.

A significant part of creating unity with God and one another is being open and honest with our lives. Praying with a group of people may be a new experience for you, or it may be familiar. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.