

John 17:20-26

Introduction

Our third look at Jesus' great High-Priestly prayer, and we marvel at the fact that He, in this prayer just before He died, thought of us – **I pray also for those who will believe through their message** (John 17:20). He prays two things for you and me. Firstly, for unity, and secondly that we may be with Him and behold His glory.

Unity of all who believe

That all of them may be one (John 17:21). The word unity is the watchword among many in our time, especially in the ecumenical movement. It is often, but not always, understood to mean joining together of all denominations into one great world church. Yet this seems to be far away in thought and purpose from the Lord's mind.

For whom does He pray? He is speaking of those who believe in Him, those who were given to Him by the Father, those to whom He has given the gift of eternal life, those who have kept His Word, those who though in the world are not of the world, those being sanctified in truth. Not the joining together of all Presbyterians, Baptists, Brethren, Anglicans etc. He is praying that these people in whatever denomination they are found may enjoy unity in Him and in the Father. Not one ecclesiastical organization, joining of all church members, with one way of worship. Not uniformity – but unity.

Even those who measure up to this description never agree about ways of worship, church organisation, nor do they believe precisely the same things down to the last detail, or agree on every detail of Christian conduct. Unity of personal relationship is what Jesus speaks of. Modelled on the union of God and Christ, **May they be one as we are one** (John 17:22). Sharing common life and love. So Jesus prays that all who are indwelt by Him might enjoy one mind, will, heart and love. He is speaking of spiritual, internal and heart unity. Love which all members of same family should enjoy. All looking to the same Father, same Saviour, same indwelling Holy Spirit.

Love transcends all outward divisions. This unity and love is to convince the world of the truth of the Gospel and of Christ. **May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me** (John 17:23). The experience of unity and expression of it would be a "supernatural fact which would require a supernatural explanation." The world would exclaim, "Look, see how those Christians love each other." Our aim should be to show, in every way within our power, that oneness with all who are with us in Christ Jesus, so that outsiders will realize the reality of the message we preach.

As much as we possibly can, let us live peaceably with all men, especially those one with us in Christ. Bear much, concede and put up with much before we plunge into needless partings. Alas how much sniping, denunciation, attacks, suspicions, mistrust, operation of selective conscience there is within the evangelical world. Such divisions are more numerous today than at any time in the past. A shameful situation, which

can do nothing but harm to God's cause. So many seem to spend more time contending with the brethren, instead of contending with sin and the Devil.

Are we a part of this great unity? Not a question of profession, or of being on the church roll, belonging to a denomination. Rather, it is a question of whether we have eternal life, been given to the Son by the Father, are in His family, have come out of darkness into His marvellous light. Does Christ dwell in us, and are we in Him? Are we born from above?

Being with Him and beholding His glory

Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world (John 17:24). This is a beautiful and touching conclusion to Christ's prayer. This is His purpose for you and for me. These words were meant to cheer and comfort those who heard them.

We may not see Christ now, but we read of Him, believe in Him, and rest our souls in His finished work. We walk by faith, not by sight. There will be an end to this state of things one day. At length we will see Him as He is, and know as we are known. We shall see Him face to face, not through a glass darkly.

This is the state of the departed, now in paradise. They have gone from us – but they have gone to Him. “Absent from the body, present with the Lord.” Where Christ is, there His servants are. They are enjoying closer communion with Him now than they ever knew on earth. Flesh and sin have dropped away, they are freed from toils and cares, and circumstances have changed. Yet there is going to be an even fuller manifestation of Christ after the resurrection at the Second Coming. We will all have glorious resurrection bodies to clothe our disembodied spirits. The whole family will be gathered together. Communion with Him will be perfect. We will behold His glory, share it, and enjoy it. We will see His face, actually be in His presence and company, and never have to leave it.

We know little of heaven now. There are many unanswered questions about future life. **What we will be has not yet been made known** (1 John 3:2). But the main thing is we are going to be with Christ. We need no more information. Where that blessed person is - who was born for us, died for us and rose again for us – there cannot be any lack. **In His presence is fullness of joy. At His right hand are pleasures for evermore** (Psalm 16:11). The joy we have now is only a faint foretaste of what is to come. **We will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words** (1 Thessalonians 4:17,18).

Apply these words to those who have gone before us in Christ. There is a place where Jesus is revealed in all the splendour of His majesty amid angels and glorified spirits. Those who have died have not been banished into a mysterious land. They are with Christ in Paradise, serving Him and seeing His face. Are we not glad to hear of the promotion of those whom we love?

So when our turn comes, let no gloom encompass us. Dying is but going home. Rejoining those who have gone before. Going to meet with Christ where He is. To behold His glory. And so forever with the Lord.

*“So when my latest breathe
Shall rend the veil in twain,
By death I shall escape from death,
And life eternal gain.
Knowing as I am known,
How shall I love that word
And oft repeat before the throne
‘Forever with the Lord’”*