

# His Prayer

*John 17*  
(verses 20-26)

## 1. The ***Expanding Unity***

- John 17:11; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; John 13:34-35;  
Ephesians 4:3-6; John 17:21

- A Oneness of Purpose
- A Oneness of Truth
- A Oneness of Love

## 2. The ***Enlarging Witness***

- John 17:20, 21, 23; Romans 10:14

- Telling People the Message
- Public Demonstration of Unity

## 3. The ***Evidenced Christ***

- 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13-14

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## **His Prayer<sup>1</sup>**

### **John 17**

(verses 20-26)

When I was a kid I remember watching Saturday morning cartoons and Scooby Doo was a popular one. How many of you remember that cartoon? How many of you have heard of it but never saw it? Anyone *never* heard of it? "The Gang," as they were called, was a group of twenty-somethings and a dog that solved crimes. The gang was made up of Daphne, Fred, Velma, Shaggy, and Scooby Doo, the dog. They were always getting themselves into trouble here or there—getting robbed, scared, lost. In each adventure, their job was always the same: discover and catch the bad guy, and it didn't matter if the bad guy seemed to be a ghost, a witch, or any other ghoul. Zoiks, Scoob! Ruroh! But every episode would end the same—the Gang would catch the villain, and in every single episode, the villain turned out to be a person you'd never expect. We'd always assume the bad guy would be that really mean tour guide, or the obsessive park ranger, or the mean gasoline attendant from the beginning of the episode. But as the Gang ripped off the mask of the villain, it was always quite the surprise. The bad guy always turned out to be the really nice janitor, the sweet teacher, or some other seemingly "good guy." And the bad guy always said, "I would've gotten away with it if it weren't for you meddling kids!"

Not meaning to be sacrilegious at all, but in the story of Holy Week that begins with today, Palm Sunday, you might wonder who will turn out to be the bad guy. Like in Scooby-Doo, the villain and the monster aren't who we thought they were. In the Gospel stories, *everyone* fails; everyone sins against Christ—even the best disciples, even the "good guys." In the end, the villain is *us*.<sup>2</sup> This is evident especially on Palm Sunday, when the very people who cried out in praise to Jesus, were the same ones who just five days later were demanding that Jesus be tortured and crucified. They are us, and we are the bad guys.

That's part of what makes the prayer of Jesus so powerful. When Jesus prayed this prayer, he was just minutes from being arrested, and hours away from hearing the crowd of previous-praisers clamoring for his crucifixion. Jesus *knew* this about them, but in John 17 Jesus prayed for *them* – and just as shockingly, he prayed for us.

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<sup>1</sup> Resources: William Greathouse, "Beacon Bible Commentary: Vol. 8." Kenneth Chafin, "The Communicator's Commentary." William Barclay, "Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of John, Part One." John Barry, "Faithlife Study Bible." Joseph Dongell, *John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1997) D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus: An Evangelical Exposition of John 14-17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1980)

<sup>2</sup> A.J. Swoboda, *A Glorious Dark*, pgs. 16-17 (Baker Books, 2015)

He knew that we are sinners. He knew we'd resist him, disobey him, and spit in his face by rejecting him. But he prayed for *us!*

This is the beginning of what is called "Holy Week" – when we remember the final week of the life of Jesus Christ. We often call it "Passion Week," because this final week was the culmination of Christ's love for us, going to the extent of his arrest, torture, crucifixion, death, and resurrection.

Today we conclude our four-part series called "His Prayer," looking at John 17. The entire chapter records Jesus' prayer. It's often called "The High Priestly Prayer," because Jesus, our high priest, is praying for himself, and his disciples, and us.

This sermon series has been a timely journey for us to take as we prepare for Easter, because the Gospel writer, John, records this prayer as the last actual thing that happened before Jesus was arrested, tortured, crucified, killed, buried, and then rose from the dead. In every way, this is an important prayer for us to pay attention to, to learn from, and to let change our lives.

Let me just quickly review where we've been: first, we saw in Jesus' prayer that eternal life is not so much about duration of life as it is about God-quality life, about knowing God intimately and being known intimately by him. We learned through Jesus' prayer that eternal life is about experiencing God's presence even – and especially – as we go through suffering. In fact, we can embrace suffering because Jesus suffered for us, giving us a way through it. We saw that it is Jesus who revealed the very character and nature of God to us. In fact, before Jesus, the name of God could not even be spoken – but Jesus made him available and as close to us as a daddy to his child. We can now have this relationship with God because Jesus saves us, shields us and sanctifies us, giving us everything we need so that we can carry out Jesus' mission and bring the Kingdom of God to earth.

Today we will see that Jesus prays for some things specifically that described what this saved, shielded, sanctified life-on-mission looks like.

And again, Jesus had included in his mind those who praised his arrival on Palm Sunday and would soon demand his death on Friday, and he prayed that they too would have this eternal life. And he prayed that we would, too.

So let's see this last part of Jesus' prayer for today. Why don't we show God how much we honor his Word by standing together as I read this passage to us. Remember, Jesus has prayed for himself, then for his disciples as well as for us. Now he concludes his prayer:

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

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 creation of the world.

Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.” (John 17:20-26, niv)

May God reveal His Word in our hearts in ways that bring real transformation in our lives. You may be seated.

As we look into what Jesus is praying here, remember that this prayer is a continuation of his prayer that his disciples will be saved, shielded, and sanctified. So this prayer is describing the sanctified Christian. Remember, too, that a sanctified Christian is one who is single-mindedly determined and devoted to live for Jesus, carrying out his mission, and being surrendered and submitted to the Holy Spirit who empowers and equips the disciple to carry out that mission. So this prayer describes characteristics of that sanctified life – the life that last week we all prayed to have.

Jesus’ prayer starts by focusing on...

## 1. The ***Expanding Unity***<sup>3</sup>

Once again Jesus prays that those who would be his disciples would have unity (he’d already prayed this back in verse 11). But this time, it is expanding beyond his eleven disciples; in fact, Jesus plans for, expects, and knows that it would expand *through* his disciples all the way to us, and through, us, to others.

Clearly by Jesus’ prayer, being a Spirit-filled believer means that we are united in our commitment to each other in some very, very important ways. What Jesus is praying here for us is not just that we’d all have some kind of agreement in membership or vocabulary or participation, as if we were some kind of philanthropic club. This is far from some kind of natural unity; this is a *supernatural* unity.

The nature of this oneness would be *like* the oneness enjoyed by the Father and Son – a oneness that is deeply, intimately united in the core of our being and the core of Christ’s, by the Holy Spirit.

It is...

### - A Oneness of ***Purpose***

Jesus has already made it clear that he and the Father are united in their purpose in this world – to love us with the same love they share together, and to see us brought into this saving, shielding, sanctifying love with them. He prayed that for his

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<sup>3</sup> The framework of this outline is from D.A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus*.

disciples, and now he prays it for us. He wants us to carry out that same purpose in this world: to love people in supernatural ways that will introduce them to Jesus and draw them into a relationship with him. Remember last week we saw that Jesus said he would give us everything we need to accomplish this; we can ask him for anything, and we will carry out even greater works than he did in that purpose. Listen, we talk a lot about miracles; we wonder what they are, why they show up when they show up. But if you want to *really* see miracles take place, then unite together, you and I, with Jesus, to show people the extent of God's love. When the Church is united in love for others, miracles are commonplace.

But it's not a "touchy-feely" kind of love; this is also...

### - A Oneness of *Truth*<sup>4</sup>

The power of our unity is found in the supernatural truth that Jesus is Christ and that God the Father is revealed in Jesus Christ the Son. This truth is provided for us in God's Word, the Bible. It is a sacred text because it is infused with the power of the breath of the Spirit himself:

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17, nlt)

The Spirit uses the revelation of Jesus Christ, recorded for us in God's Word, to unite us in our work together in our purpose – for every good work.

Finally, it is...

### - A Oneness of *Love*

We already mentioned that we are unified in our purpose to demonstrate and declare God's love to others. But this is also a unity of love for *each other* as fellow believers. This was so important that Jesus not only prayed for this, he added it to the Ten Commandments. Earlier in the evening, Jesus said:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35, niv)

This is the heart of the matter and it's a matter of heart; Jesus commanded us and prayed for us to love each other. This is why unity is so very important in the church! Yet it seems like sometimes unity is the last thing we have. Anyone can love the ideal church, but it's much harder to love a real church! You've heard that old poem: "To dwell above with saints we love, twill be all grace and glory. To dwell below with saints we know, well, that's a different story!" Right? Why do we get so divided?

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph Dongell, [\*John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition\*](#) (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1997), 207.

Thom Rainer is a church research specialist, and he has a list of some of his favorite, real-life reasons that churches have gotten into conflict. Here are a few:

1. Argument over the appropriate length of the worship pastor's beard.
2. Fight over whether or not to build a children's playground or instead to use the land for a cemetery.
3. A church argument and vote to decide if a clock in the worship center should be removed (*I think this one is a timely argument.*).
4. A fight over which picture of Jesus to put in the foyer.
5. A petition to have all church pastoral staff clean shaven.
6. A big church argument over the discovery that the church budget was off \$0.10. Someone finally gave a dime to settle the issue.
7. Arguments over what type of green beans the church should serve, and two different churches reported fights over the type of coffee. In one of the churches, they moved from Folgers to a stronger Starbucks brand. In the other church, they simply moved to a stronger blend. Members left the church because they didn't like the strong coffee.

In contrast to these ridiculous church conflicts, Scripture tells us to:

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:3-6, niv)

Jesus prayed that our unity would not only be *like* the unity of the Father and Son, but would be brought about *through unity with* the Father and Son. He prayed:

“May they also be in us...” (John 17:21)

So deep is God's love for us that He desires not only to make us like Him, but actually to *share life with us*. This is the abundant, eternal life that is a God-quality life, given to us by the Spirit within us, allowing us to know God in deep, intimate ways. The rich, living, intimate connection between believers and God makes (or *should make*) such a profound impression upon the world:

“...so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (John 17:21b, niv)

In other words, when the world sees the miracle of love among believers in Jesus, the world should conclude that everything Jesus said and did represented the very truth of God for the redemption of the world.<sup>5</sup>

This is the supernatural witness to the world that will cause them to see Jesus in us. Jesus prays this for us, confident that when we do this, this will be...

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Dongell, [\*John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition\*](#) (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1997), 207–208.

## 2. The ***Enlarging Witness***

It is through this witness that many, many more people down through the generations will see Jesus, be introduced to Jesus, and enter into a relationship with Jesus. This is how the church grows. The first disciples told and showed the message, and then others came to faith, and then that enlarged circle witnesses and loves, and still others believe. That is what happened to get you here. Who will be here in the future because of you? Or to put it in the negative, who will *not* be here in the future because of you? If you are not walking in God-quality life, introducing others to Jesus, and loving the people in your church, there will be people who will not be here in the future.

There are two key elements to this enlarging witness according to Jesus' prayer: The first is:

– ***Telling People the Message*** (17:20, 21, 23)

Later, the Apostle Paul reminds us that people will not believe unless they hear the message, and they won't hear it if someone doesn't tell them. (Romans 10:14)

The second vital part of the enlarging witness that Jesus prays about is:

– ***Public Demonstration of Unity*** (John 17:21, 23)

We just finished talking about this, and again, this is why unity is so very important: the future of people being saved depends on it. They must have both – they must hear you and me telling them about it, and they must see you and me loving them and loving each other.

If we only speak of the truth of the gospel, but do not include the demonstration of the power of the gospel in transformed and loving lives, the message is empty and arid. On the other hand, the demonstration of it, without our declaration of it, does not proclaim the source of our love. It becomes merely an enjoyable place. You and I, as individual believers and as a church, must both share and show the truth of the gospel to transform ordinary lives into God-quality lives. The enlarging witness is "both confessional and demonstrative. It is a witness of word and of love."<sup>6</sup>

All this is possible because, as Jesus prayed, we have...

## 3. The ***Evidenced Christ***

At the center of the expanding unity and the enlarging witness is Christ being revealed to a lost world. The evidence of Christ is in our unified witness as we declare and demonstrate God's love. Jesus is the content of the message. It is his glory in us that people see in our transformed lives and our love. Christ stands at the center, and it is Christ who is evidenced in the church's witness.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Carson, 229

<sup>7</sup> Carson, 229

At this point in the prayer, Jesus prays even more about the Father's glory and his glory, which is in us and which we also have. Jesus prayed that someday we would see his glory in heaven, so yes, heaven is our ultimate goal, our ultimate gift, and our ultimate reward. But until then, the glory that is in us is the presence of Christ himself, bringing heaven to earth. That's why the Bible says:

"Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." (2 Corinthians 1:21-22, niv)

It is God's own presence in us, by the Holy Spirit, who gives us this abundant life, and sets the very glory of Christ within us, so that we can be the enlarging witness of Christ himself, until we see Christ himself. Jesus prayed this for us, so that we would ultimately see him face to face in heaven some day. The Bible says this again in Ephesians:

"When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory." (Ephesians 1:13-14, niv)

The presence of the Spirit is with us, sanctifying us to carry out Jesus' mission – to the praise of his glory – until we see Jesus someday face to face.

So this prayer comes full circle; Jesus prayed for himself about completing his mission here on earth to give us eternal, God-quality life, that we could know God intimately through everything we go through – especially when we struggle and suffer – so we can be saved, shielded, and sanctified, in order for the world to see our expanding unity, our enlarging witness, which is the evidence of Christ in us, until we see him in his glory. Isn't this prayer a magnificent prayer, full of hope, power, love, and purpose!

So friends, it is up to us to step into that unity.

In 1957 a graduate student at Columbia University named Gordon Gould had been working with "pumping" atoms to higher energy states so they would emit light. As Gould elaborated his ideas and speculated about all the things that could be done with a concentrated beam of light, he realized he was onto something. In his notebook he confidently named the yet-to-be-invented device a Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation, or simply, LASER.

Over sixty years later, we are still seeing the impact of this remarkable tool of atoms working so closely unified that they create powerful light.

From a spiritual perspective the laser represents the ultimate expression of the impact we can have in a world in need of light. If we are able to understand the stunning power of unity expressed in a laser beam of love and translate it into our own lives, we might have a greater impact on those around us than ever before.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Sam Rodriguez, *Be Light* (Waterbrook, 2016), page 61



Would you close this sermon series with me in a time of prayer for that to happen in our church? We prayed at the end of the first sermon to step into the God-quality life and to know God intimately, and we prayed for those who don't know him. We prayed at the end of the second service to understand God is in our suffering, and to pray for those who suffer who don't know him. We prayed at the end of the third service to be saved, shielded, and sanctified, and to be brave enough to step out and tell others about Jesus.

Today, at the close of this final service, the week before Easter, would you come pray for yourself and your church, to not be double minded like the people on Palm Sunday? They were only unified by their latest desires and emotions. Come pray to be unified in our love of Christ, others, and each other.

Please, if you love you church, or you want to love your church, come pray with me.