

I PRAY

John 17:13-26

As the time approached when Jesus would be arrested and events would begin that would be the culmination of His forty-two-month incarnate ministry, Jesus prayed what is commonly called the High Priestly Prayer. Initially, in this prayer, we see requests that Jesus made regarding the completion of His own ministry and the fulfillment of the purposes of His incarnation. Starting in verse six and continuing through verse nineteen, His prayer was for His disciples. This prayer was concluded with extending His petitions to the church or those who would believe and put their trust in the completed work He came to do because of the witness and testimony of His disciples. In a very real sense, this prayer is a summary of the accomplishments and future benefits to the disciples (and beyond to the world) of the ministry of Jesus. The petitions can also be seen as promises to be fulfilled and as prophecy of their fulfillment in those who put their trust in the completed work of Christ.

Jesus first prayed for Himself that He would be “glorified.” That was not a selfishly motivated prayer because His ultimate purpose in being glorified was so that He (Jesus) would be able to bring glory to God the Father. This objective reflects the very conduct of Jesus’ life on earth. All that He did was with the intent of bringing glory to His Father. Just as the “Model Prayer” begins with “Hallowed be Thy Name,” so must everything to which we set out to do begin with that intent and end with that outcome.

The second part of this prayer of Jesus involved praying for those disciples He would be leaving behind. He had revealed the character and nature of God to them whom God had drawn to be consecrated (obedient) followers of Jesus. These three considerations (revelation, being drawn and obedience) are prerequisites for discipleship. Jesus then interceded with petitions, promises and prophecies on behalf of the disciples who would be used by God to carry out the work that Jesus began. The intercession began with the importance of “being kept” or having security in their lives as they were “left behind” as Jesus returned to the Father.

Sanctify – 17:13-19

¹³ But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. John 17:13–19 (ESV)

Jesus spoke again about the joy He anticipated in returning to the Father. The joy resulting from being liberated from the limitations of His incarnation was enhanced by realizing that He had completed all that He was to accomplish up to that point and was committed to finishing the events associated with His arrest, trial, crucifixion, burial, resurrection and ascension. At this point, His disciples were not experiencing joy but were sorrowful and Jesus was speaking these words of His prayer to give them some hope that they could and would know (experience) the same kind of joy Jesus was anticipating. Their joy would find its basis in the same foundational truths upon which Jesus’ joy was based.

They had already begun to experience some of the same responses that the world had toward Jesus simply because they were His followers and believed and acted on His words. The world (especially the Jewish hierarchy) thought that Jesus and His followers were strange and really did not fit into the prevailing culture or society. It was as if they were living in two

different worlds or as we might state it today, “they were from different planets.”

Previously, in this prayer Jesus had asked for the disciples to be kept or protected. The need for protection was there because they would continue living in the world in which there was mutual alienation. The way that security would be provided would partially come from the natural separation that results from a sense of alienation or a realization that they were different from the world that was separated from God.

In a real sense, a person who has been born again of the Spirit of God and has become a new creation in Christ (where the old things have been replaced by new things) finds himself set apart or isolated from and unable to participate in events and activities that are common place to unbelievers. Coincidentally, this is what the word “holy” implies or means. We find this idea (of separation) also expressed by Jesus in His prayer for the disciples in verse 17 “Sanctify them in the truth of God’s word.”

Believing and embracing the word of God creates a supernatural fence or wall that protects us from evil influences and desires that would seek to ensnare us and keep us from carrying out the works of righteousness, in a gracious manner that strengthens our innermost being to be further conformed to the character of Christ which we recognize as the fruit of the Spirit. As Alexander MacLaren summarized it, “Security from evil is given that we may be wholly devoted to the service of God. The evil in the world is the great hindrance to that.”

We recall the words of Jesus recorded by John in chapter 14, verse six “I am the Way and no one comes to the Father but by this Way.” This same concept was repeated in what John recorded in 16:18 where we see the parallel of the ministry to which Christ calls each believer to continue Jesus’ earthly ministry. We are sent (by the Son) in the same “Way” that Jesus was sent by the Father. The parallel goes a step further in that we have a charge to glorify God through Jesus Christ in the same “Way” Jesus was to glorify the Father in everything He did. Finally, just as Jesus had the presence of the Father (I and My Father are one), we have the presence of Christ in us by the Holy Spirit in our lives to lead us and empower us for the work to which we are called.

Jesus showed us the essence of God. He earlier said “I have manifested your name.” He showed them (and us) the “nature” of God. In a parallel manner, we are to show the world the essence, nature and true character of God. When we see Him for Who He is and we think, speak and behave like Him, then He appears and God is glorified.

Jesus made an observation that He was no longer “in the world” but His disciples were still in the world. Therefore, they needed help because of the world. The world is the enemy of the cross and the cross is the way that we have been commanded to follow. The world would try to dissuade us from the way of the cross because (to the world) it does not make sense to “win by losing” to “live by dying.”

In verses 11-16, Jesus continued to pray for His disciples (who would be “in the world”) that they would be protected. Protection would be needed since the world would hate them and persecute them because they held to and were obedient to the word of God. Jesus did not request that His follower be taken out of the world but that they be set apart or sanctified through the truth of the word of God. In living their lives in accordance with the principles of the Kingdom of God, they would bring glory to God by bearing the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of grace and the fruit of righteousness. This is the means by which the Holy Spirit continues the work of Christ through the Church. In verses 17-19, He prayed for their purity.

Jesus did not limit His prayer request to the first group of disciples, but He included all that would follow after Him in all ages.

Unite – 17:20-23

²⁰ “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one, just 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 have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. John 17:20–23 (ESV)

Jesus had prayed for His followers to have protection and purity. The next petition was for unity. After having been set apart from the world while still in the world, one of the key factors for success in what they were called to do is to have unity among themselves. We (in the company of those who believe in Jesus) also need to be of one accord and one mind today. The lack of unity in the church today is a direct hindrance to the expansion of the Kingdom of God that results from having more believers who rely upon the completed work of Christ for their salvation. When unity is present and obvious, then the barrier to belief caused by disunity is removed. If we are functioning with the mind set of the world and the old nature, then unity is hardly possible. This objective of unity is made possible by Christ giving to us the glory which God the Father had given to God the Son.

The unity that Jesus wanted for His followers is described as being like the unity He had with God the Father. He said, “the Father and I are one.” They were “one” (inseparable and in accord) because Jesus was in the Father and the Father was in the Son. That is exactly the same kind of terminology used by Jesus (and later by Paul) to describe the unity of believers with the Father and the Son through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in each believer.

The topic of “glory” is mentioned in verse 22 as something that was imparted to disciples of Christ. What is that glory? The answer is found in the first seven words of verse 23: “I in them and You in Me.” What was it that set Jesus’ life apart from the lives of other people? First was that He was born of the Spirit of God and not the seed of Adam. Second was that He was empowered by the Spirit of God for His public ministry that began when the Spirit descended upon Him. Third was that He did only the will of the Father which was accomplished by following the leading of the Holy Spirit in everything. All of these things that brought glory to Jesus’ life are available to those who will repent and believe and then trust and obey. This will bring to us a measure of the same glory in this life and will allow us (in the future) to see and participate in the glory that Christ has in heaven.

When the distinctiveness that set Jesus Christ apart from other teachers and leaders is absent among those who believe in Him, then that causes the unbelieving world (that is observing and inspecting the church) to not believe that Jesus “was sent by God.” We see this lack of belief expressed by many so openly say that Jesus was a great teacher and did many great things but was not any different from other “spiritual” leaders that we find recorded in world history. There are many followers of such leaders in the world today and these followers have great devotion to the teachings and ideas of those leaders. The objectives of the kingdom of God have been assigned to those who truly believe. To accomplish those objectives requires unity. That unity results from each one of us being conformed to the image of Christ so that we can carry out the works of righteousness that God had foreordained for us. In other words, when we are like Him, then He can be seen by the unbelieving world and as He is lifted up then He draws these (unbelievers) to Himself.

The work of the Kingdom of God is hindered if everyone is not pulling in the same direction. It is a sad commentary when churches spend more time criticizing each other than criticizing the work of the devil. The only unity that has ever worked or will ever work in the

future in is unity that based on the person of Jesus. If we start adding other things, then disunity is the likely result.

The Puritan preacher Thomas Brooks wrote: “Discord and division become no Christian. For wolves to worry the lambs is no wonder, but for one lamb to worry another, this is unnatural and monstrous.” Unless the church wakes up to the necessity of unity in the body of Christ then our efforts at evangelism will have only modest results because people will not believe that Jesus is the Messiah come from God.

Gather – 17:24-26

²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵ O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”
John 17:24–26 (ESV)

Jesus had already prayed for the disciples (then and now) to be protected, purified, unified, and now He requested that they be participants in His glory. The specific request was that they may **see** His glory. My initial thoughts were that He literally meant to gaze upon with our eyes. Then I thought of a similar (English) word that Jesus used when He was teaching Nicodemus about the Kingdom Heaven in the third chapter of John’s gospel. In John 3:3 “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot **see** the kingdom of God.” The meaning of the word used in John 3:3 is more along the lines of having a mental perception of a concept, while the word used in verse 24 is used more often in terms of “viewing” but can also mean to perceive something.

Most commentaries lean toward interpreting the idea of “being with Me” in terms of our going to heaven at the end of our lives or at the end of time. However, there is a definite possibility that what is meant is that when we have the mind of Christ and when we are in agreement with Him and we are walking in His way, then we will be able to more fully perceive His glory that He had prior to that glory being laid aside when He took on the form of humanity in His first advent.

The prayer concluded with an affirmation of His completion of the mission to make the Father known to those who were called and responded by coming to Jesus and accepting His message of salvation. The result would be that the love of God would be in shed abroad in the hearts of those who repent and believe, those who trust and obey.