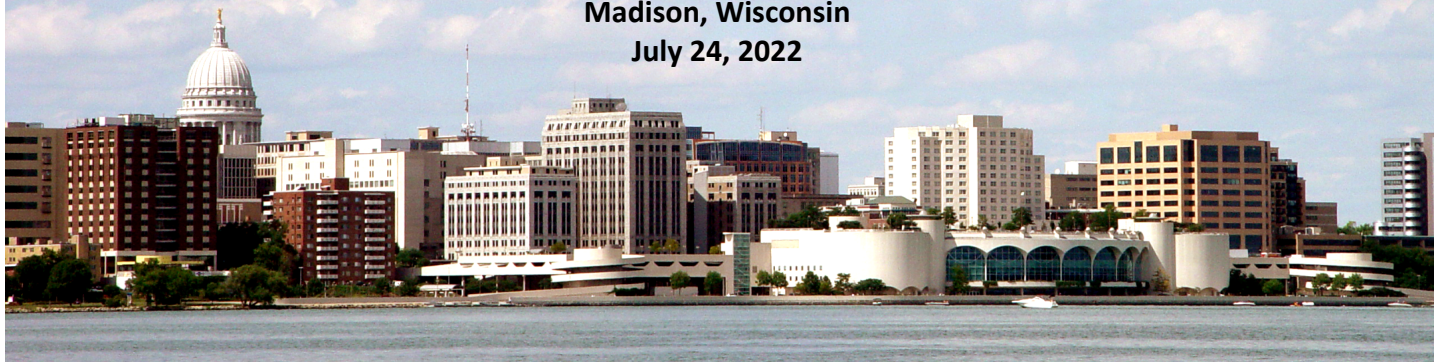


Jesus Prays for Us

JOHN 17:20-26

**Baxter T. Exum (#1651)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
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It is good to be back with you this morning! If you are visiting with us today, we would invite you to fill out a visitor card online, and we would also give the reminder that the elements for the Lord's Supper are available on the table in the entryway.

We had some good visits with several congregations over the past two weeks (in Asheville, North Carolina, as well as in Daytona Beach, Florida). We were also able to visit with some friends and family – an aunt and uncle on Amelia Island in Florida, Carl and Stacy (former members here) in Jacksonville, Keola's brother and sister-in-law in Tennessee – but, as most of you know, a highlight for me was being able to preach at the church in Key West, Florida, the church my grandfather helped establish when he was in the Navy back in 1942. They are doing a good work in a difficult mission field. They are an active congregation, with a clothing give-away program very similar to ours (pictured in the lower right up here). They also have Bible classes and worship in three languages – in English, in Spanish, and in Creole. Last Sunday, we did church for maybe 5 or 6 hours – English in the morning, Spanish in the late afternoon, English again in the evening, and Creole after that. It was a long but encouraging day. We stayed with the preacher and his wife, Rod and Barbi Aleandre, pictured in the upper right. And when we woke up Monday morning, Rod (originally from Haiti) took me out in the backyard and gave me a lesson in how to harvest coconuts! We rustled up half a gallon of coconut water and a huge pile of coconut meat for breakfast, and it was a great experience.

As we get started today, we are giving the reminder that although we are lost, God has provided a way for all of us to be saved through the gospel, the good news that Jesus died on the cross, was buried, and was raised up on the third day. We obey the gospel by believing it, by turning away from sin, by confessing Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with him in baptism, an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins. And today, we are sharing an example from the church in Honolulu, Hawaii. They posted a week or two ago and say that "Another soul [has been] added by the Lord to his church (Acts 2:41-47). Li made the decision to put on Christ in baptism. Praise God!" I love that they happened to share a picture of the Bible study. This is a huge part of it. We must understand what the Bible teaches. But we share this by way of encouragement: What Li has done you can do also. If you would like to learn more, please pull me aside after worship today or get in touch with one of our elders, and we would be glad to open the word of God with you.

This morning, I would invite you to turn with me to John 17 as we take a few moments to study a prayer that Jesus prays for us (p. 1690). I hope you will not get too upset with me if I share a picture of a Florida sunrise this morning. It has nothing to do with the lesson, but we are simply using this as a background. Our text, though, is found in John 17. And what happens in John 17 takes place on the night before Jesus dies. In John 13, he washes the apostles' feet, he institutes the Lord's Supper, and then he continues over the next several chapters with some words of encouragement. As we studied several weeks ago, he explains that he is leaving to prepare a place for them. He then promises the coming of the Holy Spirit. He encourages his disciples to love one another. He predicts his own death and resurrection. And then, in John 17, Jesus prays. He lifts up his eyes to heaven and prays to his Father.

I know, when somebody refers to the "Lord's Prayer," we often think in terms of Matthew 6, **"Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name,"** and so on, but that is more of a sample prayer. That prayer was not an actual prayer, but it was a lesson in how to pray. I say this, because in that prayer, Jesus prays for forgiveness. Jesus never needed forgiveness, but we do. That prayer, then, was an example, an illustration. In John 17, though, we have what I would describe as the "actual Lord's prayer." This is a prayer that Jesus actually prayed. And in this prayer, he prays for himself (in verses 1-5), he prays for his apostles (in verses 6-19), and starting in verse 20 he prays for us. If you are in John 17 already (and I hope you are), notice the shift that happens in verse 20. He's praying for his apostles, and then he says, **"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word."** That's us! All of us here this morning are those who have believed in Jesus based on the word of the apostles. We are studying the book of John! Starting in verse 20, then, Jesus is praying for us. And based on Hebrews 7:25, I would suggest that Jesus is still praying for us. Even today, Jesus is our high priest, and the author of Hebrews tells us that because of this, **"...He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."** We are the **"them"** in that passage, and here in John 17 we have the prayer that Jesus is praying, a prayer for us.

So, for the rest of our time together this morning, I want us to look at Jesus' prayer (we'll look at the text itself), and then I'd like for us to notice several practical lessons based on what Jesus is praying for in this prayer. But first, let's look at the text. This is John 17:20-26. In this prayer, while speaking to his Father, Jesus says,

²⁰ "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 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. ²² The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ "O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; ²⁶ 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."

So again, in these verses, Jesus is praying for all future disciples – for the thousands who will be baptized in the book of Acts, and for all of those who will turn to God in obedient faith for all time to come, including all of us here this morning. This is Jesus' prayer for us. Over the next few moments, I'd like for us to note five of the major **"thats"** in this passage. He prays that this, this, and this will be true for his followers.

I. **And the first “that” comes in verse 21 (and is repeated throughout the passage) as Jesus prays THAT HIS DISCIPLES WOULD BE ONE.**

Jesus is praying for unity! Out of everything that must have been on his mind on this night before his death on the cross, Jesus prays that his disciples would be **“one.”** And from the beginning, unity among God’s people has always been a challenge, but it is a worthy goal, demonstrated by Jesus who brought unity between men who would have been at war with each other otherwise. We think about Simon the Zealot and Matthew the tax collector. Here we have Matthew, collecting taxes from his Jewish brothers for Rome (an occupying force), and we have Simon, who had dedicated his life to opposing the Roman occupation. Simon was basically part of a terrorist organization, dedicated to opposing the rule of Rome in Jerusalem, using any means necessary. Jesus calls both men, and they unite behind the mission of preaching the good news of Jesus. They come together on the word of God. In fact, in the verses leading up to this, Jesus prays for the apostles and says (in verse 17), **“Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”** The truth of God’s word is what sets us apart. The truth of God’s word is what brings us together. I think back to our travels over the past few weeks. Somebody in Key West, Florida, can obey the gospel, and if I also obey the same gospel, we are **“one.”** There is unity between us. We may come from different cultures and backgrounds, we may even speak different languages, but we share a common faith. We are together.

As we talk about unity, though, we should probably note what Jesus is NOT suggesting here. He’s not saying that anything goes. He’s not telling us to ignore what somebody teaches. He’s not telling us to tolerate anything and everything that may come between us. Truth matters. Jesus, for example, did not unite with the Pharisees and the Sadducees; but instead, Jesus called them out on some things. He even described them as being **“sons of the devil,”** and so on. Some things are true, and some things are false, and not everything needs to be tolerated. In fact, in the Bible, there are a number of situations where God specifically forbids unity. In Matthew 18, Jesus tells us how to deal with sin, and if somebody refuses to listen to correction, that break in unity is recognized in heaven. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul tells us to remove the wicked man from the congregation. In Romans 16:17-18 and in 2 John 9-11, we are not to have fellowship with those who teach what is false. In 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, we are to break fellowship with the undisciplined who refuse to obey God’s instructions. In Titus 3:10-11, we are to reject (or turn away from) those who are factious (those who cause trouble in the church). In Ephesians 5:11-12, we are forbidden from participating in the unfruitful deeds of darkness. There are times, then, when unity is forbidden. The kind of unity Jesus prays for here in John 17, though, is a unity based on our obedience to the word of God. If you obey the word of God, and if I obey the word of God, we are together.

And the practical application of this prayer for unity is that we rededicate ourselves to respecting the authority of God’s word. As we reach out to the world and welcome people from all backgrounds and cultures, with varying talents and abilities, the potential for disunity may be pretty high. We counter this potential danger with a mutual respect for the authority of scripture. If I obey it, and if you obey it, we are one, despite our differences in other areas. And taking his word as our guide, we forgive, we serve, we look out for the interests of others, just as Jesus has done for us.

II. **This leads us to a second “that” in this passage, as Jesus prays (in the middle of verse 21) that we may be one, EVEN AS YOU, FATHER, ARE IN ME AND I IN YOU, THAT THEY ALSO MAY BE IN US.**

So, the prayer is that we may be IN GOD. And Jesus uses this to illustrate our unity. We might even think of this as being a clarification or an explanation of the first part of the prayer. We are to be united with each other, just as Jesus and the Father are united, and the goal is that **“they”** (referring to us) **“may be in us”** (referring to Jesus

and the Father). I know we may discuss how God dwells in us, we have these discussions on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9). We have several references to Jesus dwelling in us as well (Romans 8:10). But here, Jesus is praying that we may be in him and that we may be in the Father. In terms of us being *“in Christ,”* we might think of that extended run-on sentence in Ephesians 1, where Paul writes about us being *“in Christ,” “in Him,” “in the Beloved,”* and so on. This is the Lord’s prayer here in John 17. He prays that we (as future disciples) *“may be in Us”* (with reference to himself and the Father).

The blessing of being in Jesus and in the Father is made possible by what Jesus was about to do on the cross. His sacrifice opened the door for fellowship with God. He takes the first step and invites us into that relationship. And on the night before he offers himself for us, he prays for us. We are on his mind. He prays that we may be in Him, in the Father, that we may partake of the divine nature. And if this sounds a bit familiar, it’s because Peter (having heard this prayer) prays the same thing himself in 2 Peter 1:2-4, where he says,

² Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; ³ seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. ⁴ For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

Jesus has blessed us with the opportunity to be *“partakers of the divine nature.”* Through him, we have the opportunity to be in Christ, in the Father. And on the night before he dies, this is his prayer. We play a role here as well, and that is: We trust and obey, we pray, we sing, and we listen to him in Scripture. But the prayer is that we would be in Christ, in the Father.

III. This leads us to the third “that” in this passage. Jesus prays for unity (at the end of verse 21) SO THAT THE WORLD MAY BELIEVE THAT YOU SENT ME.

In a way, this is a part of Jesus’ prayer, but in a sense, this is also the goal of unity. When the world sees the unity we enjoy (unity with each other and unity with God), the Lord’s prayer here is that seeing this will cause the world to believe that Jesus was sent by his Father. God’s plan is for the Christian faith to grow and to replicate. Our belief causes others to believe. Our obedience encourages others to obey. Getting along isn’t just for our benefit, but our fellowship should cause others to want what we have. Think about the opposite of this: If we are always fighting with each other, that’s a distinct turn-off, isn’t it? If we get together and argue all the time, the world is not interested. They get enough of that out there. The church is to be an oasis, a calm in stormy times. It is to be different here than it is out there. In the family, we love each other. We care for each other. And this love and concern is obvious, or at least it should be. This is something we demonstrate – not to show off, but because this is who we are. We love each other. And this peace we share is alluring. One preacher speaks of the world and says, “Like homeless orphans with their noses pressed up against the window, they will long to join the warmth and fellowship of the family circle.” Isn’t that an interesting picture? And I think that’s what Jesus is praying for here. He wants our behavior and our example to be appealing to the world. It’s not that we just go out and lecture, but we show and we tell. We demonstrate.

And this is why the family grows so quickly in those first few chapters in Acts. Thousands are baptized, and then Luke says (in Acts 2:42-47),

⁴² They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many

wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. ⁴⁶ Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

This kind of unity is obvious to the outside world and has a way of being contagious. This week, then, let's live in a way that makes it easy for people in the world to believe that God really did send Jesus. Let's find something we can do to show what we believe. Maybe I go next door and say, "Hey, my church family is getting ready to give away clothing to the neighborhood. I've got a load ready to go, and if you'd like to get rid of anything, I'd be glad to pick it up." That gives them an opportunity to help, but it also shows that we're the kind of people who believe in working together.

IV. There's a fourth "that" in this passage (in the middle of verse 24), as Jesus prays THAT HIS FUTURE DISCIPLES WOULD BE WITH HIM, SO THAT THEY MAY SEE HIS GLORY.

All of these are tied together, because in Colossians 1:27, Paul writes about God making known, "**...the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**" When Christ is in us, we have the hope of future glory. When Christ is in us, we are blessed right now, but we also have something to look forward to. And that seems to be what Jesus is praying for in verse 24. He's praying for that day when future disciples would be with him, "**so that they may see [his] glory.**" This is the goal. As Jesus just said earlier this same evening, "**In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also**" (John 14:2-3), and "**I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me**" (John 14:6). God has always wanted to be with his people. We see it in the Garden of Eden, we see it with the tabernacle and the temple, and we see this with Jesus as well. So, Jesus prays that his future disciples would be with him and that they may see his glory. And this motivates us. We are looking forward to seeing Jesus face to face. This is his prayer for us. This is our prayer as well.

V. All of this brings us to the last "that" of this passage, as we find that Jesus prays for us (in verse 26), praying to his Father, SO THAT THE LOVE WITH WHICH YOU LOVED ME MAY BE IN THEM, AND I IN THEM.

Jesus' prayer for us is that we love just as he loves, and just as his Father has loved. His prayer is that we love, that we be full of love, that God's love be in us. And once again, like unity, love is something the world notices. Love is not something we fall into, but love is something we do. Love is a decision to do what is best for another person. Love is a decision to do for others what we might wish to have done for us under similar circumstances. This is the dropping off of a lasagna that we talked about several months ago. This is watching somebody's kids so they can get away for a few hours. This is covering somebody's shift at work when they are having a family emergency. This is taking a friend out to lunch. This is opening our home to a stranger. This is stopping to help change a tire. Love is a decision to do something helpful.

Right after Jesus washes the disciples' feet, he says (in John 13:15), "**For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.**" Not that he was establishing foot-washing as some kind of empty religious ritual, but he was saying: Do whatever it is that needs to be done! A few verses later (in John 13:34-35), he says, "**A new**

commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Again, like unity, love is something that makes the Christian faith appealing to the people around us. And when we love, we are simply doing for others what God has done for us. To me, that’s pretty motivating! We aren’t just forcing ourselves to do good, even though we really don’t want to. No, we love, because he first loved us. We’re just passing it on. And so, if somebody irritates me, before I react, I need to remember that I have probably irritated Him. And when I’m faced with an opportunity to help, even sacrificially, I need to remember what He has done for me. We love, because he first loved us.

Conclusion:

As we think about Jesus’ prayer for us, I hope we realize that this prayer is not answered by accident. Sometimes we say, “Pray as if it depends upon God, and work as if it depends upon you.” To me, that seems to apply here. With each of these ***“thats,”*** I’ve tried to mention something we can do. So, there’s some action here. But I would also point out that what Jesus prays for, we can probably also pray for. I know we’ve mentioned this from time to time, but it bears repeating: When we pray, we often pray for the sick. That’s what’s on our minds. And when we are the ones who are sick, we appreciate it. It is good to pray for those who are sick. But prayers back in Bible times were a bit more than that. Jesus prays:

- That We May Be One
- That God May Dwell In Us
- That the World May Believe
- That We May See His Glory
- That We May Love

And if Jesus prays for these things, maybe we should as well. So, we do have some things we can “do” this week, but we also have the reminder here to refocus the way we pray. Let’s pray for this congregation, and specifically, let’s pray for future disciples, just like Jesus did. Let’s pray for the Four Lakes congregation, not just for the church here the way it is right now, but let’s pray for the Four Lakes congregation 10 years from now, 20 years from now, a hundred years from now. Let’s pray like Jesus prayed.

As we continue in our service, let’s go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

We pray that these ancient words will be fulfilled in our hearts and in our lives. We pray for this congregation, that we will be true to your word, that we will follow you faithfully. Bless our elders and deacons. Let us be the people you want us to be. Help us to be more like Jesus. Help us to live each day anticipating the eternal home that you have prepared for us.

As we worship you this morning, we pray that you would fill our hearts with the joy that comes from knowing you, and your Son Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Help us to be an enthusiastic people, full of joy and love and service, ready to do your work. Bless our efforts to tell the world around us about your son and his great love. Today, we pray for those who will come to know you in the future. We pray that they will be united in service and love, overwhelmed by your glory.

Thank you for all blessings because it from you that all blessings flow. We love you and we thank you in the name of Jesus. Lord, come quickly. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com