

## Reflection

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### John 17:20-23

*20 “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 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. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—23 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. (NIV)*

In a world, country, and city, it’s a complete counterculture for us to even talk about being unified amidst so much division. We are divided by ethnicity, race, doctrine, church, etc., but this is not the original intent of Jesus. Here in John’s gospel, he records the real Lord’s Prayer. This prayer is one in which Jesus is pouring His heart out to God about those who would be in His care. He is praying to God to be glorified, he then moves to pray for the disciples and finally ends by praying for the future church. It’s obvious Jesus would foresee a moment in which the future church would need to be unified amongst a world where division reigned.

In the kingdom of God, there must be unity, and must be intentionality to maintain unity among believers. Jesus tells us, “If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.” (Mark 3:24) In this particular verse, Jesus was speaking about the kingdom of darkness and how it contended for unity, but also gave us a lesson in regard to walking without division. Unity doesn’t mean we all agree and conform to particular thoughts, but it does mean we are intentional in focusing on what brings us together versus what continues to separate.

Our unity is a reflection of Jesus and God. Jesus prays, “that they all may be one, as You, God, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.” (John 17:21) Our contention to lean in and make sure to remain together, is exactly the relationship between the Son and God. We expect God to come amongst our churches to save, heal, redeem, etc., but when we seek to place our differences on the forefront, we make it a difficult task for God to do what only God can do.

As you can see in this moment, Jesus was praying for people like you and me—people who, generations after the first disciples put their faith in Him, would respond with that same faith. Jesus was praying for us. And His prayer is so timely for the needs of Christians today.

Have you ever wondered why unity in the church seems so difficult? At this point, churches fighting over minor issues, political stances, and personal opinions have become cliché in many circles. It's as if the world expects us to be difficult with one another.

### **Concern for Unity**

The word translated as "unity" in this passage carries a certain relational overtone. Unity isn't simply agreeing with one another on doctrinal or political issues of the day. Unity, in this sense, is loving one another and being so close to one another that disagreements on doctrinal or political issues do not jeopardize our relationships.

Jesus started His prayer by using His relationship with God as an example of closeness. The two are portrayed rightfully in this prayer as being 'in' one another. They are so close that to tell them apart is challenging. The cyclical language paints a picture of extreme closeness, trust, love, honor, and respect for one another.

Jesus' desire is that we as Christ followers will reflect the closeness, He has with God in our own relationships.

Jesus' prayer was so focused on closeness that He even pointed out the potential our closeness has in helping others believe that God sent Jesus for the purpose of the gospel. There is no doubt that our closeness in unity is overwhelmingly valuable to the mission of Jesus.

Today we look into Jesus' prayer specifically for you and for me. Here is what I find most surprising about this passage: the very thing that Jesus is focused on and concerned about in his prayer life is often forgotten or thought unnecessary when we go to pray. Why is it that those who have the mind of Christ and the words of Christ find little joy in praying the prayers of Christ?

I wonder just how much people in the church really know the deepest desires of Jesus? Jesus really desires an intimate relationship with us. That eternal life is all about drawing close to him, knowing him, and being known by him.

But that's not his only desire for us. He desires us to be in complete unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Jesus desires that we have the same kind of relationship with each other as he does with the God. A relationship where we are one. What does that mean?

Part of that means unity in purpose. That we are all working together toward the same goal: the preaching of the gospel. But I think it also means a relationship where we are honoring each other above ourselves. Where we're looking out for each other's interests above our own. (Philippians 2:3-4)

But too often, we don't live that way. And when people walk into the church, they encounter racism and they see the same bickering, resentful spirit that they see outside the church. The result? They walk away.

Meanwhile, the people in the church are so self-involved, they don't even notice what just happened. And because of that Jesus grieves.

How much do you grieve Jesus by how you treat others in the church? By the jealousy, the backbiting, and the resentment you hold in your heart. Not only are we hurting him, but we hurt ourselves. Worse, we cause the world around us to continue stumbling in the dark because they're convinced, they won't find any light in the church.

How about you? Are you one of those in your church?

### **Unity is possible among those who believe in Jesus**

- Jesus prays for those who believe in him through the word of those who belong to him
- The gospel is the only path to unity. It is the gospel proclaimed by the apostles and believed by the church.

### **Jesus prays for us all to be one**

- Jesus is concerned about unity among all those who believe in him
- Jesus prays for unity because our natural inclinations are toward segregation

### **Our oneness should reflect God's oneness**

- True unity is being together such that doing life without each other is unthinkable.

### **Jesus is concerned about us being in Them**

- Jesus prays that we would abide in them

### **When the world sees us as one and us in Them then they will believe**

- The goal here is for the world to see the powerful gospel uniting us to each other and to God
- When the world sees unexplainable love and unexplainable faith then the world will believe God sent Jesus the Son
- For this seeing and believing to occur the church must not retreat from the world but seek to be the church in the world

I think Jesus is praying that we, the church, would overflow into the world and change the world

### **What does the prayer of Jesus mean for the National Council of Churches in Australia?**

#### **Jesus gives us his glory for unity**

- Jesus possessed the glory of the only Son (John 1:14)
- Jesus gives us his glory to us. (John 1:12-13; Galatians 4:4-7)

- The powerful gospel that makes us followers of Jesus is the powerful gospel that makes us one (17:22)

### **The Father is in the Son and the Son is in us for unity**

- Gaining God begins the journey toward unity
- Our growth in unity proclaims the miracle of the gospel
- Gospel-unity says that Jesus has come
- Gospel-unity says that sinners and enemies are loved

I want us to see the centrality of the gospel of Jesus Christ and how that gospel unites us as God's household, as sons and daughters of God. And I want us to see that this unity is incredibly practical. Our love for one another and our bond as a faith family should make an impact on our neighbours.

Jesus wants His church to experience gospel-proclaiming unity in the world. He wants it so badly he dedicates his last precious moments of prayer with his disciples to it. Let's see why gospel-proclaiming unity is so important to Jesus. But first, let's pray that as we listen to God's word the desires of Jesus would become our desires.

### **Completed by Unity**

Jesus then prayed specifically about two surprising and valuable things. Jesus told God that He had given us the same glory that God had given Him. Jesus also stated that we are being perfected in our unity.

Here are a few things to take away from this portion of the prayer. Although the Christian path will involve struggle, through our community and close walk with one another, we will experience glory. It is tempting to think individualistically when reading this prayer, along the lines of "Jesus has given His glory to me." But the context suggests that the glory of God given to the Son has now been given to the church. Christ's people. Us. We experience glory within our communal walk with God as we grow close to other Christians.

The word translated as "complete" is not so much a measurement of quality as a measurement of wholeness. We are being completed as individuals and as a group as we grow closer together in Christ.

The most compelling and exciting thing in this prayer to me are the final words. Jesus pointed out that when His people live in unity and closeness like His relationship with God, people are compelled and convicted to follow Him.

Christian culture must encompass the biblical model of love, trust, unity, and closeness. People will be compelled by our relational connectedness. People will be tempted by our tenderness. People will see profoundness in our fondness. Let them see perfection in our passion for one another.

## **Conclusion**

I began by stating my goal: to change the way you pray. I hope now you see how the gospel is big enough to produce unity among us. And I hope you want to display our common ground of belief in Jesus Christ. We now have the opportunity to do that.

As followers of Jesus, we are just ordinary people, but we are called by God to be Christ's ambassadors and we are called to do extraordinary things.