

**Reading:** John 17:1-26

**Theme:** The High-priestly Prayer.

We have started a week of prayer for the New Year ahead, being the church's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. Why? Because without God's blessing on the work we any year can accomplish very little of eternal worth. Prayer is so important in the life of a Christian, in the life of churches both big or small. We can pray for the Lord's work to prosper and pray for other believers near or far.

In OT the task of the high priest was to approach God on behalf of the people and represent them before God. This is the setting here in John 17 - our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus is going to His Father in prayer. We can learn much of prayer from this amazing chapter. Charles Spurgeon said *"Some brethren pray by the yard, but true prayer is measured by weight, and not length."* In this chapter we have the greatest prayer ever prayed and it takes about 5-6 minutes to read out loud. It is great because of who prayed it - God the Son with true humanity on Him; great as to when He prayed it - on the eve of His sacrificial death for sinners and also because of what it reveals - the expectation and triumph we can have as a believer - kept, sanctified, have security, unity and glory; but I'm getting ahead of myself...

This prayer naturally divides into three main areas and I will use the headings in NIV to help us go quickly through this magnificent chapter. Even if we did an in-depth study on it, we would not dig out and reveal all its treasures, so I ask you to read it through, think and pray about it yourselves and get as many of its riches, treasures and sweetnesses out for yourselves.

### **1. Jesus Prays for Himself** (v1-5)

He prays to God as His Father - directly to God the Father and did so conscious of His unique relationship with Him, as He is God's

only begotten, one and only Son. Yet by all He accomplished for us, even though we are not naturally God's children, He has made us to be children of God and we can call Him "*Our Father*", even "*Abba, Father*". Jesus prayed in this intimate way and we also can go directly to God and need no intermediaries, but we do so with honour and respect and not flippantly or lightly - "*Our Father, who art in heaven...*" A number of writers say this prayer gives us a glimpse of the intimacy the Lord Jesus enjoyed in prayer while on earth. It is only a glimpse and even if we saw more, it would be nothing compared to the intimacy, unity, harmony and unmixed pleasure He enjoyed in heaven, but gave up to come to earth to be our Saviour.

Yet that separation, that absence from heaven was soon-to-be ended and was to involve all the horrors and agony of the cross – for the time had come. Here Jesus prays that through it, as He glorifies the Father, He Himself would be glorified. Jesus knew the Divine timetable and although the cross lay ahead, it was the place where He would be glorified and He would glorify the Father - their renown and glory be furthered through it.

The Father would glorify Him in all He went through - the signs and wonders that accompanied His death; by His sufferings - as He conquered sin, death, hell, principalities and powers and then as He was glorified after His sufferings - His resurrection, ascension and glorification (Philippians 2:8-11). Oh to catch glimpses of this glory in our view of Christ's death for us, as it would stir our hearts up as we'd glimpse of the glory in the cross and the glory He has returned to, which was the glory He had before the world began, as well as the glory that was heaped on Him there in heaven as the Mediator. Yet in it all Jesus, the Son of God, glorified the Father - declared the Person, the Being and

the heart of God towards mankind and He did it so that all would think the better of God the Father - "*Hallowed be your name*".

The Lord Jesus owned that He had been given power over all flesh i.e. people, so that He might give eternal life to all the Father had given Him. Eternal life is summarised in v3 "*Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*" - it is knowing, not just about, but personally knowing, in a love relationship, the Father and the Son. Do we know this relationship and how amazingly wonderful it is? Jesus did all this and He completed, brought to completion and perfection all that the Father gave Him to do. On the cross, there came a point when He could cry out "*It is finished*" - all had been done for our salvation and there was nothing more that could be done - by Him or anyone else! He is an amazing Saviour - we need such a great Saviour as our sin is great in its guilt and offensiveness, but we can take comfort that He is greater. Moving on we see:

## **2. Jesus Prays for His Disciples** (v6-19)

Jesus' love and concern for His disciples comes through more clearly in these verses than anywhere else. Here He prays for them - not the world (v9). Jesus does things for His believing people that He doesn't do for the wicked and unbelieving. People do not like this idea - they feel that it is the job of God and Jesus to look after all and treat them all alike. In one sense He does - sends His sun and rain on the righteous and unrighteous, He has accomplished the redemption sufficient for all mankind, the gospel call is offered freely to all, but that redemption is only effectual (effective) to those who believe and these ones are the particular objects of His love, care and keeping. While He is enthroned and glorified in heaven, He is ever making intercession for His people on earth - not just these first disciples, but also us

as believers. We too have the special focus of the love, care and prayers of the Lord Jesus in all we go through and He is keeping us in all situations of life as we go into the New Year and all it will bring.

The disciples had heard and kept His word. They and we were the ones given Him by the Father. This is a mystery - the Father making over to Jesus all He had set His love on - as a charge, a trust, as the crown and reward for all He would do. We as believers are in His care, He saved us on purpose and given us eternal life. The disciples knew, although not fully, but were aware that Jesus had come from the Father and they believed the Father sent Him. It is for these ones that Jesus prays. The greatest thing the Lord Jesus can do for anyone is to reveal God the Father to them and cause them to realise He has come from the Father; as it means they have trusted Him alone for their salvation and not on what they can do or feel. Wonderfully, He continues interceding for us - which is much more than praying, but is looking after our best interests in every way - working all things together for our good...

We are to be those through whom glory comes to our Saviour (v10) - even while we remain in the world. So often believers may want to leave this world and go to be with their Saviour, yet He leaves us here on purpose and does not whisk us off to heaven the moment we are converted. He leaves us here on earth to show the power of grace, to make proof of our faith in the good and bad times, to develop our courage and certainly our patience! This goes on even during our hurting and painful times - which may not make sense as we go through them, but one day we will and we will praise Him for all the way He has kept us and safely lead us. Now we are to realise we can rest on Him at all times and in all situations we enter into in 2020 and beyond...

The Lord Jesus prays for the true unity in truth and of heart of His disciples. He goes on to pray for His disciples' safety and security even though He is going away from them. He had kept them safe and lost none - Judas is mentioned, but it seems he never had salvation, never trusted Jesus even though he had so many privileges - he blew them and wasted them!!

Jesus goes on to pray for their full measure of joy - Christianity is not joyless and we sing "*solid joys and lasting treasure none but Zion's children know.*" This true joy is to be known, experienced even as the world hates God's people, so the Lord Jesus prays to the Father to protect them. It is not only to protect them He prays, but also to sanctify them - keep on making them more holy, Christ-like, Godlike and to do this even in an evil world that hates them. God still does this and most often the means He uses is His truth - God's truth is God's word. Jesus puts an emphasis on God's word in v8, 14 & 17. We need to note that and are to read and hear God's word regularly. The disciples were sent out into the world just as He was - to bring the gospel message in the Father's name. Here the Lord Jesus was setting Himself aside as holy, to be the sin offering - so they and we could be sanctified, made holy.

At this point in my preparation I went "*Whew!*" - what an amazing prayer for the first disciples, all disciples. It is thought to be His pattern that He uses to pray for you and me now! Even this day our Saviour has prayed for and is praying for us. Aren't we are honoured and privileged people! But see finally:

### **3. Jesus Prays for All Believers** (v20-26)

In Barton a man named Alf Boucher, who in his late 70s started coming to church and started reading the Bible - Genesis onwards. When he came to this chapter, he was amazed - that Jesus prayed for the people in our day, the following week it was "*Jesus prayed*

for us”, the week following that it was “*Jesus prayed for us as believers*” - he was spot on! He had become a believer and was baptised a few days after his 80th birthday. Many of us here and countless others have believed the gospel message passed on by the Apostles. Here Jesus prays for the oneness and unity of all believers. This is not an organisational structure type unity, a facade of oneness, but true organic, Christ centred and God’s word directed unity - because we have eternal life in the Son of God. It centres on the truth of God's word - primary, essential truth and with tolerance in secondary matters e.g. I was once asked “*Are you Baptist by conviction?*” The answer was “*Yes*”, the enquirer said “*Shame!*” – it was said with a smile on their face and a twinkle in their eye.

The unity we are to imitate is the unity of the Father and Son, believers are in them. Wow – a big concept! With this unity in place and worked out, we'll drive home the gospel and people will know the Father has sent the Son. We have a tremendous privilege, but also an awesome responsibility on us. This is further stressed by Jesus intimating that we are the guardians of His glory which has been given Him by the Father (v22) and that is to be worked out in true unity among believers and is only possible among those who are in the Father and the Son i.e. those who have trusted the Lord Jesus alone as their Saviour. The amazing truths in v23 are staggering and I do not intend to comment on them, but encourage you to read, think on and marvel at these things, especially that we are loved by the Father as He loves the Lord Jesus!

In v24 Jesus says He wants us and all believers (*those given to Him*) to be with Him where He is (*i.e. heaven*) and see the glory the Father has given Him because of the Father's eternal love. Jesus wants us with Him - we were rebels, sinners, those who trod

underfoot Jesus, His grace and love; we've let Him down and failed Him; undervalued His so great salvation and misused His patience; we have been unprofitable servants - yet He wants, desires, has a delight, longing, yearning, for you and me to be there, to see His glory, to marvel at God's love for Him and therefore God's love for us!

One day that is our destiny, our end - no matter what trials and struggles we have now or will go through in the future course of our lives. One day when life is over, we will see our Saviour in all His glory and more than that we will be like Him (1 John 2:3). Isn't this breathtaking, isn't it just so incredible - our little brains and hearts cannot fully grasp it, express it or take it in; but we should consider it often, marvel and thrill at it. Everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ will one day see Him in all His glory, power and love, so all we can say is "*Bring it on!*"

In v25 & 26 the Lord Jesus owns what He has done for us - that we know the Father through Him because He made the Father known to us and He continues to do so to us, does so to people all over the world. We are to pray He will make many to know Him in our days: family members – spouses, children, parents, grandchildren, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters; friends, colleagues, people in the area, further afield and the world over. He must do it - for it is **His work and not the work of any man and woman**, yet He is pleased to use ordinary people like us to tell the gospel and, through us telling and living out the gospel, He will work. All this is so that the love the Father has for the Son may be in us and we want others to know the life transforming love of God and so show Jesus is in us.

I have tried to compress so much into this message, I fear what I've said will be something like the report of King Solomon's

wealth and wisdom which the Queen of Sheba heard - that only the half had been told her, but I have to own that I have only scratched the surface! Yet, like the zesting of an orange or lemon and its fragrance spreads, so I pray that we've found the fragrance of this chapter sweet and refreshing. If that is the case how much more will be the partaking fully of this chapter, so in the year ahead let's get into this passage, read it often, pray over it, but more importantly, experience it, delight more and more in its truths and especially in the One who prayed this remarkable prayer which includes people like us.