

## Sermon – 30/07/2006 pm

### Jesus Prays for all Believers

Study Text: John 17:20-23

There have been many declarations of peace in the Near East in recent years but none have lasted. The US president wants a peace that will last and he is not the only one. Most people want peace and not war. They want peace among the nations, peace in their community, peace in their homes and peace in their own hearts. But where will this peace come from?

The first step is to have peace with God our Creator. Those without peace do not know God and cannot know God outside of Jesus Christ. Scripture says *therefore having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* (Romans 5:1). It is in Jesus Christ that we find peace with God, and having peace with God we can have peace with one another. Every human being is born an enemy of God because of sin. Sin separates us from God but in the blood of Jesus Christ we have forgiveness of sin and peace with God.

Jesus was in the upper room with the eleven disciples when he lifted his eyes to heaven and prayed to his Father. Very soon he would be hanging on the Cross making atonement for sin, the sin of the whole world and for all time. *Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*. Having prayed for himself, and for his disciples, Jesus goes on in this prayer to pray for all who would believe in him *through their word* (17:20).

Jesus scans the future and sees all who will believe in him through the gospel preaching of his disciples. This was remarkable considering the current weakness of their faith. Some suggest that Jesus was thinking of the Gentiles being brought into the faith, and this may well be the case. Was Jesus also thinking of you and me as he prayed this prayer? He who saw Nathaniel under the fig tree could also see into the future. Jesus did not pray for any who had died, but he did pray for those yet unborn.

### Oneness

Jesus had already prayed for the eleven *that they may be one as we are* (17:11). That request was linked to the Father keeping them through his name. Here oneness or unity is requested directly for all believers. This unity is modelled on the unity between Father and Son in the Godhead. But this divine unity is more than just a model – it is the foundation for the unity of all believers. Jesus prayed *that they may be one in us* (17:21). Those who are born again of the Spirit of God are a new creation in Christ Jesus (I Corinthians 5:17). *If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ they do not belong to Christ* (Romans 8:9). All believers are indwelt by one and the same Spirit of Christ.

Jesus goes on to pray about the glory of God which he gives all who believe. What is this glory? This question has challenged students of the Bible for centuries. It must have something to do with the revelation of God's glory in his son Jesus Christ. *We beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth* (1:14).

In Jesus Christ the disciples saw the truth; they saw grace and mercy as never before revealed to human beings. Not only did they see that glory in Jesus, but Jesus said he had imparted that

glory to them, to those who believed in him. If Jesus was coming to dwell in them, if it was a case of *I in them and you in me* (17:23), then his glory must of necessity be in those who believe.

The bread and the wine which we ate in the Lord's Supper were not transformed or transubstantiated into Christ's blood and Christ's flesh, but we must remember this vital unity that we have in Jesus Christ. *He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him* (6:56). It is by the grace of God, through faith, that we are brought into this vital unity with Christ. The sacraments remind us of this amazing grace and the truth we have in Jesus Christ.

Jesus not only gave them divine glory, he loved them with divine love. *(I) have loved them as you have loved me* (17:23). Jesus told his disciples directly that he had loved them. *As the Father has loved me I also have loved you; abide in my love* (15:9). Jesus does not pray that they will love one another – he commanded them to do so – telling them that by this all will know that you are my disciples (13:34). His prayer is for this same purpose – *that the world may know that you sent me* (17:23).

The love of Christ is like the glue that holds believers together. These days we have such a wide range of adhesives in the stores. There are products to glue together glass, wood, masonry, tiles, plastics, paper etc. There is a glue for almost everything, but no man made product that will glue together fractious human beings. Where can we get a glue that keeps believers from breaking away from the body?

Love will keep us together, the love of Christ. The love that took Jesus to the Cross to die for us is an amazing love. He died for us while we were still his enemy. Do you know that wonderful love of Jesus? Do you thank Jesus for that great love? This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us (I John 3:16). Abide in the love of Jesus, bathe in his love, let his love fill every corner of your being, and control every aspect of your life. Then you will be able to obey his command to 'love one another as I have loved you'.

## **Witness**

Why is oneness so important? Why was Jesus praying so specifically about unity? Firstly, it is essential for our sanctification, our being made holy, as seen earlier in this prayer (17:17). Here Jesus prays *that they may be made perfect in one* (17:23). Our sanctification will continue till the day that we meet the risen Lord in glory. We will never be perfect in this world – as we so often remind ourselves when we fall into sin. But we must strive for perfection (Philippians 3:12). We must remember that oneness is an essential part of this striving. Disunity severely disrupts our spiritual growth.

Secondly, oneness is essential if outsiders are to believe in Jesus (17:21, 23). Nothing is more detrimental to the witness of Jesus Christ than a lack of unity among his followers. Jesus was not talking about organisational unity, though outward unity is important. This is what the world sees. But the world can also see through superficial unity.

Today we have some churches barely holding together in one communion. They portray a unity, but divisions are numerous and deep. The world sees it all. Unity of course must be based upon truth; it must be based upon the unity of the Godhead. The world also sees churches splitting up all around.

No church is immune to schism – except the true church, the invisible church of all believers. But we must show the same concern that Jesus did in this prayer for unity, for it affects his witness to a lost and broken world.

‘We can ask no stronger proof of the value of unity among Christians, and the sinfulness of divisions, than the great prominence which our Master assigns to the subject in this passage. How painfully true it is that in every age divisions have been the scandal of religion and the weakness of the Church of Christ! How often Christians have wasted their strength in contending against their brethren, instead of contending against sin and the devil! How repeatedly they have given occasion to the world to say, ‘when you have settled your own internal differences we will believe’! All this, we need not doubt, the Lord Jesus foresaw with prophetic eye. It was the foresight of it which made him pray so earnestly that believers might be ‘one’ (Ryle).

True unity in Jesus Christ, unity stemming from the unity of the Trinity, unity based on truth, grace and love will shake the world and oblige it to confess the truth of the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Will you sincerely seek this unity in Christ? Confess your sin and look to Jesus, for unity is in him and him alone. Listen to his command to love one another as he loved you. Then the world will know that you are his disciple, and it will know that God sent his Son into this world and will believe in him.

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