

Sunday, August 16, 2020

Bible Study

John 17:1-26

Listen to Pastor Kelly's sermon for August 16, and then read John 17:1-26.

“I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father...Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (*John 16:28, 32-33*).

These are among Jesus' last words that John records for us before He is betrayed and crucified. “The hour has come” (*17:1*), Jesus says. Yet that ‘hour’ (the crucifixion) which seems like a tragic miscarriage of justice to us is the very victory that glorifies the Father and manifests the Father's love for the world. Not only this, that ‘hour’ glorifies the Son and makes a way for the world (all of us) to experience the life and love of the Father and the Son. A life and love that, beginning here and now, are eternal (*John 3:16, 10:10*). Moreover, that ‘hour’ sets us (those who follow Jesus) apart to continue the work of God's Son. It mends, repairs, and redeems our marred selves so that we may bear God's image as faithfully as did His Son. (vv. 4, 6-8).

This is not to say that those first disciples would not and did not feel the pain of Jesus' death. The victory of Jesus would be hidden for a time. “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament,...You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy” (*John 16:20-21*). On that third day, the light of the morning sun would reveal that the tragedy and brutality of the Cross had been mingled with the light and love of God. For not even death can defeat the love and life of God, “Take heart; I have overcome...”

But here we are, in John 17, just before that ‘hour’. And in this calm before the storm, as the anxious hearts of our forebears in the faith begin to despair of the future, Jesus prays. He prays for them (vv. 6-19) and for us (vv. 20-26). He prays because, while the light has entered the world, the world has not comprehended it (*John 1:9-11, 3:19*). He prays because there will still be many battles, even though the victory has been secured. He prays because He knows that in this world we will continue to have ‘tribulation’ (Greek - *thlipsis* - ‘crushing pressure’).

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Knowing that the world will treat His disciples the same way it treated Him (v. 14, *John 15:18-20*), one would expect Jesus to ask the Father to spare them, to remove them from the ‘crushing pressure’ that the world applies to those who choose to bear the Father’s image rather than the world’s. Instead, Jesus prays, “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one...As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (vv. 15, 18).

Jesus’ prayer for us is not that the Father would take us out of the world, but that the Father would “keep” (protect) us while in the world. That the Father would “keep” us in His Name so that the very character of the Father would be ours. That the Father would “keep” us **for** unity and joy (vv. 11, 13, 20-23) and “keep” us **from** the evil one (v. 15). That the Father would by His keeping, “sanctify” us in truth (v. 17). To sanctify something is to set it apart as holy, and for a particular service, and only the Truth can do this.

The Truth about who the Father is and His love for us (v. 23). The Truth about who the Son is and that He came from the Father (v. 8). The Truth about who we are in the Son and that we are made to glorify God. As the Son glorifies and is glorified by the Father, the Son and Father are glorified in us (vv. 10, 22). This Truth, sets us apart to continue the work of the Son and keeps us unified in His joy as we face the lies and ‘pressure’ from the enemy.

Our unity is essential if the world is ever to know this Truth as well (v. 23). It is Jesus’ chief concern for us as He prays. Jesus’ ‘oneness’ with the Father (*John 10:30, 14:9*) made for the completion of the work that the Father had sent Him to do and that same unity is necessary for the completion of the work the Jesus’ sends us to do. The unity that Jesus prays for among His followers is found in and through their relationship with Him. In other words, His people will be united only to the degree with which they are related (united) to Him.

Yes, our unity is essential. For, “you will be scattered”, “but take heart”, “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace.” The world will try to crush you into submission and thwart the plans of God by “scattering” you abroad. “Take heart”, the “crushing” only reveals the character of God and the Father has already blessed the “scattering”. “And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...” (Genesis 1:28). For unless we are sent out (v. 18) the world may never know what eternal life is all about (v. 3).

So, may you know our Lord’s peace in the midst of this world’s crushing pressures. May you see the character of God being poured out from your life

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as you are ‘squeezed’ by those pressures. And may we all be so united with our Lord, Jesus Christ, that our unity gives the world a true picture of God’s love for all of us.

Questions for Further Reflection

What event is it now “the hour” (v. 1; *John 12:23-24*)? What is the nature Jesus’ request in verses 1-5? What does it mean to “glorify” someone or something (vv. 4-5; 10, 22, 24)? If a stranger to our world suddenly found themselves in America, what or whom we they say that our culture glorifies? Who or what have you glorified this week? How so?

Who is the focal point of Jesus’ prayer in verses 6-19? Why? Why do you think Jesus chose not to pray for the world (v. 9)? What seems to be Jesus’ concern in verses 11 and 15? What does he mean by “the name you gave me” (*see John 8:58; Exodus 3:14*)?

What do the following phrases mean: “keep them by the power of your name” (v. 11), “so that they may be one as we are one” (v. 11), “they are not of the world” (v. 14)? Why doesn’t Jesus want to take his followers out of the world (vv. 14-16)? What does Jesus mean by his request in verse 17?

Who is the focus of Jesus prayer in verse 20-26? What is his primary concern for those mentioned in 20-26? What kind of unity exists between Jesus and the Father that we should emulate? What does Jesus ultimate desire (v. 24) reveal about his love for us?

Is Jesus’ prayer a reflection of the ‘short-term urgent’ or the long-term important? Do your prayers reflect the ‘short-term urgent’, or the ‘long-term important’ needs that people have? How might our prayers similarly reflect Jesus’ concern for the eternal?

Why is unity among believers, the Father, and the Son so crucial to the completion of God’s mission (vv. 21, 23)? How important to you is unity with other believers? What can we do to experience more unity?