

Ice Breaker

If you knew you only had one more day to live, how would you pray for your loved ones?

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you have unity with the Father and You welcome us to enjoy the same union. You prayed for Your disciples, and You prayed for us. May we be one even as You are one with the Father and the Spirit, Open our hearts and minds to receive from You, that we may be transformed by Your love. Amen

Tonight's reading is the whole of John chapter 17.

Interesting facts.

Tonight's prayer is Jesus longest prayer, it has 715 words.

This is the last time that Jesus speaks to all his disciples together before the crucifixion.

John Knox, the Scottish reformer, had this prayer read to him everyday during his final illness and in his final moments.

Oliver Cromwell's chaplain, Thomas Manton, preached 45 sermons on it.

And Marcus Rainsford, an Irish preacher, wrote more than 500 pages of expositions on it.

As you can tell there is much we could go into this evening, but really we would need several sessions to try to get through it all. So, I will try my best to be as concise as I can be tonight.

Setting the scene

In John 13 we have Jesus and his friends (the Disciples) having the last supper and going through chs 14-16 Jesus continues to teach his disciples. And finally in chapter 17 before they head off to the Garden of Gethsemane where finally he will be betrayed, he prays.

These last hours and moments with his friends must be poignant and filled with meaning.

And so when Jesus prays this his longest prayer, in it he welcomes his friends into His deep intimacy with His Father. He prays for himself, first, that he might bring glory to the Father, then he prays for his friends (the disciples) that God would protect them after he leaves, and finally he prays for the disciples yet to come (i.e. us, those who spread the Gospel news of Christ).

Let's now read John chapter 17, This as I have said is a long prayer and rather than listen to me the whole time I have requested a couple of friends of mine to ably assist me with tonight's reading. Ronnie and Alex will help me out here.

Session Focus

As we see this prayer of Jesus, is one that has a lot more detail than any prayer we have heard from him before, this prayer can be broken down into three parts.

The first part of the prayer is a celebration and a request. The two being closely linked, Jesus is celebrating the fact that his work is done, he has completed the deeds and words that the Father has given him to do. He has laid before his disciples all that the Father has given to him. This is the reason for the celebration, and it is the grounds for the request he now makes. His request is that he is exalted, glorified, and lifted up to that position alongside the Father, that place that he had once before. Jesus knows that there is one more step to come, that of death on the cross. But once this has been completed and the final victory over death has been won, then all his followers, all who trust him and believe that he has truly come from the Father and unveiled the Fathers purpose, all can possess eternal life 'here and now'.

This is part of the theme of John's gospel, John 3: 16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. And John 5:24 "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.

Jesus has been praying in this first part for himself, for celebrating his doing the Fathers work and knowing that very soon it will be completed. There doesn't seem to be much here for us. But as we shall see in the next two parts of the prayer, although the relationship between Jesus and the Father seems extraordinarily close and trusting, it is not designed to be exclusive. And so we are invited to join in.

The second part of the prayer Jesus prays for His disciples. What Jesus now prays grows out of the fact that he is going away. He is entrusting the disciples to the Father he has known and loved throughout his own earthly life. The Father who, he knows, will care for them every bit as much as he has done himself.

Jesus is very much aware that the disciples are at risk. The world, which hates them as it hated him, will threaten and abuse them. They don't belong to it, but they are to be sent into it, and they need protecting. That's what this section of the prayer is about.

The world, remember, in the gospel doesn't mean simply the physical universe. It means the world insofar as it rebelled against God, has chosen darkness rather than light, and has organised itself to oppose the creator. Seen from within that world Jesus is from elsewhere, and so to now we learn are the disciples.

What they need now is to be kept from being pulled back into the world with all it's wickedness and rebellion. Jesus during his ministry on earth has looked after them, like the good shepherd he is. Now that he is coming back to the Father, he is entrusting

his Disciples to him, who will continue the work of keeping them safe. In praying for them now, he is simply praying that what he has begun, the Father will gloriously complete.

Jesus in the third part of this prayer prays for those who will follow Him throughout the ages. (Including us.)

Imagine some great figure from the past, Shakespeare, Washington, Socrates, Joan of Arc, someone whom you admire. Then imagine that they have just discovered some uncovered manuscripts, and in these manuscripts there is a letter from the person themselves. Imagine in it they are talking about you.... Who would you feel?

Delighted? Ecstatic? Overjoyed?

That's how we as Christians should be feeling about verse 20 of Jesus prayer, Jesus is talking about you and I when he says "Those who believe in me through their word."

It is through the word of His disciples and followers the message of God is announced around the world. Those who have heard and believe pass it on. The church is never more than a generation away from extinction, all it would take is for one generation not to pass on the Word. But its never happened and that's awesome when we come to think about it.

A major theme of this part of the pray is the union (unity) that Jesus has with the Father, which he extends to his followers. Jesus takes us to the Father, vs 23 "I in them, and you in me-so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know you have sent me and loved them even as you have loved me.'

Because God the Father and Jesus the Son welcome us into their circle of love (via the work of the Holy Spirit, who is given at Pentecost), we dwell with God and Jesus dwells with us. This changes everything. Through the indwelling, God shares his love with us; He comforts and encourages us; He brings to mind people we can pray for and serve; He inspires us by His word; He convicts us of our sin. And as we see in Jesus's prayer, it is through the indwelling Christ that we have unity with other Christians. Christ in us breaks down barriers and forms deep connections between people- a unity that speaks louder to the world than simple words.

In the end the whole prayer comes down to being about love, vs 26. The love of the Father surrounding Jesus and this same love, as a bond, surrounding all Jesus' people.

Conclusion

The chapter in the study guide defined this prayer as "The Farewell Prayer"!

But John 17 is one of the greatness chapters in the Bible and certainly one of the most treasured. Some refer to it as the "Holy of Holies of Sacred Scripture." The revelation of Christ's heart as he bared his soul in a final public prayer to the Father before he stepped out into the night and onto the cross.

Philip Melanchthon, who along with Martin Luther was a towering intellect of the early reformation said:

“There is no voice which has been heard, either in heaven or in earth, more exalted, more holy, more fruitful, more sublime, than the prayer offered up by the Son of God himself.”

John 17 is captivating because it shows us the kinds of prayers Jesus offers for us in heaven. The thrust of vs 11-19, in which Jesus prays for his disciples, is that they would relate properly to one and other, and to the nonbelieving world.

And this prayer(s) of unity continues in the closing verses with Jesus praying in vs 20-23 his earthly prayer for the church, in vs 24 his heavenly prayer for his church and vs 25-26 his eternal vow to his church.

Some commentators would say that the gospel of John is summed up in this prayer of Jesus; the love of God the Father, through Jesus the Son and Holy Spirit to his creation.

Questions:

Which of the three sections of Jesus' prayer strikes you the most? And why?

Put yourself in the disciples sandals. What do you think you'd be feeling and thinking as you witnessed Jesus at prayer?

What does the indwelling of the Triune God mean to you? To your everyday life?

In the light of this prayer and our union with God, how can you pursue **unity with fellow followers of Christ? What's one thing you could do this week?**

Prayer time

Personalise prayer of Jesus

Final prayer :

Father God, Lord Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, you welcome us into your circle of love. May I live there forever with You and may you use me to welcome others in too. Bring unity and peace to my brothers and sisters, that the world might see Your love flowing from us. Amen.