

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Equipped BY Jesus to Live FOR Jesus

(Studies in the Upper Room Discourse; John 13-17)

The Lord's Prayer

(John 17)

Study #5

Introduction: The disciples' prayer...

Well into the second half of Jesus' three-year ministry,¹ His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray. Jesus was more than happy to do that and told them to pray like this:

[Luke 11:2] "Father, hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

[3] Give us each day our daily bread.

[4] And forgive us our sins,

For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And do not lead us into temptation."

That's Jesus' most concise teaching to His disciples about prayer.² It gave them a basic outline for approaching God in prayer.

This prayer - what we call "The Lord's Prayer" - was a very helpful training tool for them, and it's helpful to us, today, who also want to learn how to pray.

Now, I'm not trying to start a major shift, but I do think that it would be better if we called that prayer, "The Disciples' Prayer."

¹ I base this timing note on Harold Hoehner's helpful book, Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ, pp. 45-65.

² He also gave this teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, at Matthew 6:9-13, using slightly different wording. It seems that He gave this prayer on several occasions.

What we'll see this morning is, actually, the Lord's prayer. Today, we listen to Jesus, praying.

We are not surprised that Jesus concluded His last time with His eleven remaining apostles with prayer.

Study the life of Jesus and you'll find that He was a Man deeply committed to prayer. Even though He was the Son of God, He expressed His dependence on His Father through the lifeline of prayer.³

The prayer before us this morning is unique among Jesus' prayers we find in the Bible, for both length and breadth.

It is the longest of His prayers we have. And, given that He prayed it just hours before His death, we're hearing Jesus pray about the matters that were closest to His heart.

We can't be exactly sure where Jesus was when He prayed this prayer. It was on the night before He was crucified, and before He and His disciples had reached the Garden of Gethsemane.

I would guess that they had stopped somewhere along the route to rest and Jesus took the opportunity to pray.

First, He prayed for Himself. If you have ever had the thought that praying for yourself is inappropriate, think again. Jesus, our example in everything, prayed fervently for Himself here.

Jesus Prayed for the Glory of God (vv. 1-5)

Jesus Prayed for His and the Father's Glory (v. 1)

[1] Jesus spoke these things; and raising His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, so that the Son may glorify You..."

There is seriousness in this prayer. But it isn't gloomy. Jesus wasn't depressed.

³ He evidently prayed this out loud, so that the disciples heard Him.

He was aware that the time had come for Him to die. And He knew that He wasn't going to die just any death. He will be crucified.

He was about to carry out John the Baptist's prediction. He is going to become the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.⁴

To men of His day, crucifixion was a symbol of all that was violent, torturous, and evil. To Jesus, the cross was the source of glory.

This was the hour for which He had come into the world. Now was the time for the fulfillment of His life's mission.

Jesus looked at the suffering He would endure on the cross as the time when He and His Father would receive maximum glory.

That is His first prayer. He asks that both He and the Father be glorified by what is about to happen.

Knowing Jesus = Having Eternal Life (2-3)

[2] "just as You gave Him⁵ authority over all mankind, so that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. [3] And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

Jesus exercised the authority the Father gave Him, not by lording it over anyone, but by serving, by freeing people from the bondage of sin. He used His authority to give people who believe in Him eternal life.

Listen carefully here, because this is where Jesus defines for us what "**eternal life**" is all about.

Fundamentally, "**eternal life**" doesn't mean "*live forever*." "**Eternal life**" is qualitative. Eternal life consists of entering into a never-ending relationship with God and with His Son, Jesus. (v. 3)

The great news about the good news is that we don't have to die to start eternal life. It begins the instant we trust Jesus. And that is how the cross works on our behalf.

All of this is what we'll call the *near purpose* of the cross - to give eternal life to all who would believe in Him.

But there is another, bigger, cosmic, grander reason for the cross than our salvation (Think, "*It's not about me!*").

The ultimate purpose of the cross is that God would be glorified.

Jesus To Receive Glory - Again! (vv. 4-5)

[4] "I glorified You on the earth by accomplishing the work which You have given me to do. [5] And now You, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world existed."

That's a lot of "*glorifying*" and "*glorying*." And it's easy to be confused about what "*glorify*" means.

So, to boil it down, to "*glorify*" someone means that you bring to light all the good things that might have been hidden about that person. To "*glorify*" someone means that you say things or do things to make them look good.

As an example, when a basketball team wins, it makes the coach look good.

Back when the Spurs were winning championships every other season with Tim Duncan, Tony Parker, and Manu Ginobili and crew, they made Coach Popovich look really, really good.

Now, Pop is a really good coach. But his players added shine to his image by great performances. They "*glorified*" him.

⁴ John 1:29.

⁵ This is Jesus referring to Himself in the third person.

Well, everything Jesus did - His miracles, His teachings, His interactions with people - made God look as good as He really is.⁶

His death on the cross will put an exclamation mark on God's goodness because the cross showcases how much God loves people. How much does He love people? ***"He gave His only begotten Son!"***

Jesus had no regrets as He came to this moment.

He was executed, accused of being a traitor to Rome and a Jewish blasphemer. Neither was true.

He wasn't a victim; He was a Victor. He wasn't a failure; He accomplished all that the Father assigned Him to do.⁷

So, Jesus prayed for Himself. His prayer began with a doxology. All glory to the Father. All glory to the Son.

Then His prayer turned a corner. From here on out, His requests focus on those who believe in Him, and His first prayers are for those men with Him on this night.

Listen to this mashup of prayers by Jesus that the Father will keep these followers in God's *"Name."*

Jesus Prayed For His Followers (vv. 6-19)

They Are in God's Name (vv. 6, 11, 12)

[6] "I have revealed Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have followed Your word...[11]...Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me..."

⁶ Luke 4:18-19: Jesus' ministry consisted of preaching the Gospel to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, setting free the oppressed, and proclaiming the favorable year of the Lord (Isaiah 61:1-2)

⁷ In John 16:33 Jesus says, - ***"I have overcome the world!"*** The word "overcome" in Greek is νικᾶω / nike. Swoosh!

[12] While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name, which You have given Me...[26] and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

What does all this mean? Well, the Name stands for everything behind the Name. In this case, the Name stands for the Person of Jesus and the Father and all the resources that belong to that Person.

In 1979, I married Kathleen Marie Kerr.

On the day we married she took my name, and immediately became the beneficiary of all my vast resources.

Granted, my resources weren't very vast. But when she took my name, everything I had became hers.

God the Father gave to the disciples His own Name. Jesus kept them in God's Name. And because they were in God's Name, they have access to all the resources they need to glorify the Father and the Son.

On the strength of that reality, Jesus made requests for them.

Requests for His Followers (vv. 13-19)

For joy (v. 13)

[13] "But now I am coming to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves."

Jesus prayed for them ***"full joy."*** And there is complete joy in doing something with complete commitment that is completely and wholly good.

Jesus wanted His followers to know complete joy as they gave themselves completely to living for Him.

And we can mark off this request as answered. One of the chief themes of the book of Acts is joy. Even when facing persecution, the disciples radiated joy.

One time, after being beaten and commanded to stop speaking about Jesus, they went out from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His Name - and they kept right on speaking about Jesus! (Acts 5:41)

Jesus made a second request for His followers.

For protection (vv. 14-16)

[14] “I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. [15] I am not asking You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.⁸ [16] They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.”

Obviously, Jesus faced tremendous opposition from His opponents. These men will also face opposition as they spread the Word after He is gone.

So, as Jesus prayed for them, He didn’t ask that they wouldn’t face opposition. He asked that the Father would keep them from the power of the evil one.⁹

It’s a request that they would be protected against the temptation to call it quits and from the temptation to compromise the message so as to avoid hardship.

Again, answered prayer.

The book of Acts and church history tell us that these men were faithful to the end. Most of them were martyred for their faith.

They all suffered greatly, but they didn’t fall for the evil one’s tricks.

And then, Jesus prayed something else for them.

For sanctification (vv. 17-19)

[17] “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. [18] Just as You sent Me into the world, I also sent them into the world. [19] And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, so that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

“Sanctify” is another word (like “glorify”) that can be difficult to understand. So, here’s a handle that helps me understand “to sanctify.”

The root meaning of the word *sanctify* is “to set something apart for a special purpose.

So, at home, my shovel is *set apart / sanctified* for the purpose of digging holes. My hammer is *set apart / sanctified* for the purpose of pounding things.

When Jesus prayed that God would *sanctify* His followers, He was asking that God would set them apart for His holy purposes.

This *setting apart* would happen as they embraced God’s truth as found in God’s Word. (v. 17)

And Jesus’ prayer for them was answered in this, too. These guys were completely set apart for His purposes, as is evident from the book of Acts and early church history.

Jesus’ heart was that these men would be sanctified, protected, and filled with joy. So, He prayed for all of that.

But in reading John 17’s prayer, we can’t miss Jesus’ overriding passion that His followers would experience unity.

One Primary Request: One (vv. 9-11)

⁸ No doubt, Judas’ recent departure (only hours earlier) was on Jesus’ mind as He prayed for their protection. Verse 12 of this chapter refers to Judas as **“the son of destruction.”** The thought is not that Judas lost his salvation. He was never saved.

⁹ Moses (Numbers 11:15), Elijah (1 King 19:14) and Jonah (Jonah 4:3,8) all prayed that they would be removed from the world - but all their requests were denied. For disciples to be removed from the world would be bad for the disciples and disastrous for the world. We are to be separated, but not isolated.

[9] "I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but on the behalf of those whom You have given Me, because they are Yours; [10] and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. [11] I am no longer going to be in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, so that they may be one just as We are."

These guys are soon to be without Jesus' physical presence. His presence had been a crucial unifying presence. So, in light of His soon departure, He prayed that they would continue to be unified.

Jesus prayed that the unity they would experience in the aftermath of His death, resurrection, and ascension to Heaven would mirror the unity that He and the Father had enjoyed from eternity past.

And, as it was with the Lord's prayer for joy and protection and sanctification, the book of Acts shows the early disciples displaying a remarkable unity as they took the Good News of Jesus from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and to the remotest part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Jesus' prayers were answered for His first followers. And now, having prayed for Himself and for them, He turned a final corner.

He looked to the future and prayed for us. That's right, we made it on to Jesus' prayer list. He prayed for all those who through the ages will believe in Him.

What does He pray for us?

He prays for the area of greatest challenge. He prayed for us just what He just prayed for those men He was with: Unity.

Jesus Prayed for the Unity of His Followers' Followers! (vv. 20-26)

[20] "I am not asking on behalf of these alone, but also for those who believe in Me through their word; [21] that they may all be one; just as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also

may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. [22] The glory which You have given Me I also have given to them, so that they may be one, just as We are one; [23] I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and You loved them, just as You loved Me. [24] Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. [25] Righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; [26] and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

That's a lot. So, as we wrap up, let's unpack this.

A True Organic Unity

The reality of organic unity

In this section Jesus pointedly prayed to the Father...
 ...that believers would be ***"in"*** that Father and Son. (v. 21)
 ...that believers would be ***"one"*** with each other. (vv. 21, 22)
 ...that believers would be ***"perfected in unity"*** with each other. (v. 23)

Then, beyond praying, Jesus also affirmed an already existing organic unity, an interconnectedness between Persons / persons that is beyond full comprehension.

He affirms that the Father is ***"in"*** Jesus. (v. 21, 23), that Jesus is ***"in"*** the Father (v. 21), and that He (Jesus) is ***"in them"*** (i.e., us) (v. 23)

There is a physical impossibility in those statements, so we aren't to take them spatially.

But they make sense if Jesus is speaking relationally - and He is. He is affirming the reality of an interpersonal unity that is deep, intimate, and organic.

Unity actually exists between God the Father and God the Son AND between God and the sons and daughters of God AND between the sons and daughters of God with each other.

We who believe in Jesus are united in Jesus, just as surely as siblings are united by a shared mom and dad.

Unity among all Christians is in place because of our faith.

- We all call God “Father” and are thus a part of one big family.
- We have all been redeemed and justified.
- We are all going to spend eternity together.
- We have all been baptized by the Holy Spirit.
- We are all indwelt by the Spirit.
- We are all members of the global body of Christ, the church.

This is why Paul wrote what he did to the church at Ephesus. We read that we are to be **[Ephesians 4:3] diligent to keep** (not “create” or “make”) ***the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.***

The beauty of a realized unity

King David began Psalm 133 with these words, **[1] Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to live together in unity!**

I don’t think that there is anything more beautiful than brothers and sisters in Jesus worshiping together, connecting with each other, and serving together.

BUT just as it is possible for family members to be united by a gene pool and still not get along, so it is possible for Christians who are united with each other to not live out that organic unity.

The Unity Challenge

There are very few things as un-winsome as Christians living as if they were enemies. And it happens. We’ve all seen it and it’s tragic when it happens.

We want to be united. And a realized unity between believers is close to the heart of Jesus. But it isn’t close to the heart of everyone...

Standing against the schemes of an enemy

A few years ago, I had the honor of getting to know a guy named Glenn Kehrein.¹⁰

By the time I met him, Glenn had worked in a multi-ethnic ministry in inner city Chicago for decades. Over the years of working in this field, he saw lots of stunning breakthroughs in unity among Christians from varying ethnic and demographic backgrounds. God did remarkable things in that ministry.

But Glenn also saw lots of ugly times when Christians divided, when there was infighting, when there was no observable unity.

Glenn pointed out that one reason Christians don’t experience unity with each other is that we don’t believe the Bible.

Specifically, we ignore the Bible’s teaching that there is an enemy who would like nothing better than to sabotage the unity that the Spirit has created, and that Jesus says is in place. (John 17)

This enemy wants us to gossip about each other, envy each other, jump to unwarranted assumptions about each other, and divide over trivialities.

And, not believing - or taking seriously - what the Bible says about him, we don’t pray for protection against his schemes, and we don’t stay awake and alert to his divisive work. (John 17:15!)

If you are experiencing a conflict with a brother or a sister at this time, either here or elsewhere, know for certain that if Satan didn’t help things get that way, he’d love nothing more than to do what he can to keep things that way.

Part of entering into a realized unity with each other involves remembering that our brothers and sisters in Jesus are not our enemy.

We’re all on the same team and we are to pray to God against the divisive schemes of our common enemy.

¹⁰ Glenn and I served on the National Board of the EFCA at the same time. We met in Minneapolis. He is now with the Lord after dying from cancer a few years ago.

One other piece of the unity challenge that we must keep front and center is simply how important it is to Jesus that we be united.

Actively pursue unity

This is the Jesus who lived for us, gave Himself on the cross for us, and rose from the dead for us. This Jesus prayed from the deepest part of His soul to the Father that we would be united.

And when, despite all the diversity of opinion and ethnicity and demography that exist between us, we unite, this Jesus is delighted.

Unity comes when we major on the majors, cherish those truths that bind us, and refuse to focus on peripherals that would divide us.

When we unite in worship and community and service, we show Jesus to be as good as He really is. We glorify Him.

As we have worked our way through Jesus' final time with His disciples, I have been struck as never before by the major themes He addressed.

He warned them of coming persecution. They needed to know that following Him will, more often than not, involve suffering. We need to know that, too.

He promised them the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit. He wasn't leaving them as orphans.

The Spirit will guide them into truth, will comfort and will strengthen them. He will give them peace. The Spirit does all of that for us, too.

And He urged that we who believe in Him "*stick close to Him*" (that we "*abide / remain*") and keep His commandments.

And He made sure that we know how close to His heart is the health of the relationships between us who believe in Him.

The themes of love for each other, service to each other, unity between us flow throughout this last scene of Jesus with His followers.

Conclusion: Unity in Jesus - A Powerful Witness to the World

According to Jesus, Christian unity is a powerful evangelistic tool. It is a wonderful apologetic for the Gospel.

We don't fight for unity solely for our own enjoyment or for personal growth. No! Jesus says that our unity will persuade people of Gospel truth.

You and I have a transcendent reason to work past our differences and to be united in Jesus. Not only does unity benefit us.

Listen to His prayer.

[John 17:21] that they may all be one...so that the world may believe that You sent Me.
[23]...“that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent me.