

## The Prayer of a Righteous Man – John 17:20-22

Today we are taking a break from our study of the book of Revelation, and we are going to look a passage from the gospel of John that is part of what is commonly known as Jesus' High Priestly Prayer or Jesus' Intercessory Prayer. It is an important passage for Christians as it describes the way in which Jesus prays for *all* who come to Him through faith. May we be comforted by the Word of God this morning.

It is an encouragement and comfort to know that someone is praying for you, isn't it? I was listening to a sermon recently by Dr. RC Sproul. In the sermon he recalled two people from his early days as a believer, back when he was in college, whom he referred to as prayer warriors. We could all probably think of people in our lives like that. One of the people Dr. Sproul mentioned was an elderly gentleman, named Dr. Jamison, in the church where he attended college. Dr. Jamison had been a medical missionary for over 40 years and was retired. He retired in his 80s and was at that time physically unable to practice medicine. He could do nothing in any strenuous physical capacity. However, Sproul remembered that he still went to work every day, eight hours a day. Dr. Sproul said that the work he went to was prayer. He would spend hours each day, as much as eight hours, in prayer. He once told Dr. Sproul, "I can't do much, but I can still pray." So many of the college students who were at the church would go to this Dr. Jamison with their prayer concerns. And to know that you got on Dr. Jamison's prayer list was one of the greatest comforts and encouragements a young student could have.

When I heard that story from Dr. Sproul, it reminded me of a time when I was young, and I was a new Christian, and I first learned of how much my grandmother prayed for me. I was at her house, I believe this was around my college years, and we were talking, and she shared with me that she prayed for me morning, noon, and night.

The comfort that brought me is almost inexpressible, but it *was certainly* powerful in my life. Dr. Sproul expressed the same comfort and peace that he felt knowing that those individuals in his life prayed for him. However, the assurance, the comfort, and the encouragement it is when other people pray for us, even those who would pray often for us, pales in comparison to when we think of the intercession of the Lord Jesus himself makes for us. To know that the Creator of all things, who loved us enough to die on a cross for us, and who holds all things in his hand; to know that he prays for us is overwhelming. That is exactly what we see taught here in John 17:20-22. We see that Jesus intercedes for His people. Not just His people at the time of His earthly ministry, but all Christians, all believers through the ages.

Do you remember that Jesus prays for you? That is – He prayed and is praying for those who have been saved. Those who have believed and trusted in Christ alone for salvation, whose hearts are surrendered to Him.

What often happens, though, is because of sin we become discouraged by the many difficulties of life. And when we are discouraged, we often forget we have a Savior who prays for us. As our great High Priest, Jesus continuously intercedes before God on behalf of His people. He is

always praying for us, for you and me, if we are His. And His intercession is acceptable and pleasing to God because He was perfectly holy and fully righteous. Therefore, we are comforted as we remember that Jesus continuously intercedes for us, *and* the prayer of a righteous person has great power.

As I mentioned earlier, John 17 is often described as the High Priestly Prayer or Jesus' Intercessory Prayer. It is so called because Jesus is praying for those who "will believe in Him". Christians find great encouragement and comfort from this prayer as we remember three things. You can see them printed there on page 6 of the worship guide. We are encouraged and comforted when we remember that Jesus prays for His people, that Jesus prays for our unity, and Jesus prays for our glory.

Let's look at these together.

In verse 20, Jesus begins by saying that – "*I do not ask for these only.*" Who is he referring to here? Well, if we back up to verse six of chapter 17, we see he was referring to his disciples at the time. He had been talking about preserving and sanctifying those who were given to Him by God. In other words, those who were believers at that time.

After that, He says – "*but also for those who will believe in me through their word.*" Who does this refer to? It is referring to those who will be saved in the future. So, Jesus says He is praying for believers at the time as well as all those who would become Christians in the future. Beginning in John 17:20, Jesus prays for everyone who will believe in Him through their Word, which is the Apostolic Word. This Word is the faith-producing Word that must be preached and through which people will come to know and believe in Christ. Belief in Jesus through the words of the apostles, what we commonly refer to as Scripture. That is what it means by "through their word". And the words of the Apostles is the word that centers around and points to the person and work of Jesus. It is the gospel.

John Newton, the writer of the great hymn, Amazing Grace, writes about his conversion through the gospel by saying, "*It is certain that I am not what I ought to be. But, blessed be God, I am not what I once was. God has mercifully brought me up out of the deep miry clay and set my feet upon the Rock, Christ Jesus. He has saved my soul. And now it is my heart's desire to extol and honour his matchless, free, sovereign and distinguishing grace, because 'By the grace of God I am what I am.'* It is my heart's great joy to ascribe my salvation entirely to the grace of God."

The gospel is the announcement of God's plan to save sinners through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Or to say it another way - It is the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

We see the concept of the gospel laid out in Scripture through verses like 1 Cor. 15:3-4 – "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in

accordance with the Scriptures,” and we see the result of the gospel in verses like Rom. 1:16 – “<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes,”

If you have heard the gospel and your life is surrendered to Jesus, then you are saved. You are born again. You are a believer. If that is true for you, rest assured that Jesus is praying for you. Christian, are you comforted by this? We clearly see here that Jesus was praying for *you*. And when he ascended to the right hand of the Father, he sits there always interceding (praying) for believers.

If you have not trusted in Christ to save you, if your heart is not surrendered to Christ, would you believe in Jesus and be saved today? Would you know the comfort and encouragement that comes as you remember that He prays for you?

So we see that Jesus prays for His people. What does Jesus pray for regarding us? Our unity. But what is this unity referring to?

First, it is a unity that it is rooted in Jesus and the truth we find about Him in Scripture. Some have mistakenly seen this as a prayer for organizational unity and a call for a greater effort to bring different churches and denominations together. But is this what Jesus would want us to do? Such efforts for organizational unity nearly always result in a disregard for theological clarity. “Theology divides; Christ unites” is an often-heard credo of proponents of such a unity. But that is not what Jesus is praying for here. He is not praying for organizational unity.

He is praying for a unity that is based on and rooted in the revelation God given to the first disciples through his Son, which they accepted and then passed on. In other words, Jesus is praying for spiritual unity that is rooted in the truth about Jesus himself. It is rooted in the gospel.

There are many things that unite groups of people these days. Take a look online and you can see groups that are united around their love for things like: a particular dog breed, a peculiar hobby, a sports team, or favorite type of car. The members of these groups can live anywhere in the world but what unites them is their love for whatever their particular thing may be.

Christians, those who have been saved by God through Jesus are united to Him forever. And they are united to one another by that common bond as well. This bond that unites believers is not merely some temporal cause or material thing. It is the source of eternal life. It is Christ himself.

If we are born-again, we have more in common and have more unity with a true believer in Mongolia than we do with an unbeliever in our very own church or in our very own family. So, Jesus is praying that we would be united to Him. In Him and in the truth of His Word.

Second, not only is this unity for which Jesus prays rooted in the truth of the gospel, but it is reflective of the unity between God the Father and God the Son. Jesus says in verse 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.” The unity that believers share is a reflection of the unity that exists in the Trinity, specifically between the Father and the Son. This is further understood if look back to John 10:30 where Jesus said, “I and my Father are one.”

So the unity described here is analogous to the unity or oneness Jesus enjoys with his father. The Father and the Son are distinguishable, yet they are one. We read in John 1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

Similarly, believers, still distinct from each other, are to be one in purpose, in love, and in obedience and submission to God’s Word.

Another thing we understand about the characteristic of the unity of the Trinity is the love shared between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Believers experience this love with the Godhead as well. Scripture describes this love this way: John 3:16 - “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” As well as John 15:13 – “<sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” And 1 John 3:1 – “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”

Jesus prays for the love that exists between He and the Father be given to or experienced by those who are children of God by faith. Those who are Christians. This is an amazing love that Christ gives to those that are united to Him by faith. It is greater than any love we can know on this earth. Do you know the love of Christ? You can know it today. Those who believe in Christ and surrender to Him, they know this love.

We also see in the last part of verse 21. Jesus prays that these believers *may also be in us*. Jesus is likely referring to the vine metaphor He used in John 15. There He describes Himself as the vine, and believers are the branches. The branches are one with the vine and derive all their needs or nutrients from it. God and Jesus are the vine and Christians are the branches.

So Jesus is saying that he is praying for everyone who has been saved by His gospel. That they may all be one. If you are a Christian today, Jesus prays that you and all other believers would be one *in Him*. This is a prayer of preservation. It is a prayer for the preservation of God’s people. This should bring us great comfort and peace and encouragement. To not only know that Jesus prays for us, but He prays that we will persevere in our faith. That we will always be united to Him and with other believers. And because we are united to Him and remain united to Him and display the unity of the Trinity, we are a witness to world.

Do you have unity with Christ, a unity that is rooted in the truth of the gospel? If you are born again, you do.

Finally, we are encouraged and comforted as we remember that Jesus prays for our glory. In verse 22 we read – “The glory that you have given me I have given to them.”

What exactly is He referring to here by “glory?” God has showered his glory on Christ, and now Christ shares that glory with his followers. Jesus bore the glory of God, and now the church is the glory-bearer. In this context the glory the Father gave Jesus is the revelation of himself that Jesus was to communicate to his disciples. By receiving that revelation, they came to share in the glory of oneness like that existing between Father and Son. It is His desire that they enter into the glory and the love of the Father that He has known.

In the book of Exodus, we read how the shekinah glory of God first moved from the mountain to the Tabernacle and dwelt among the people of God shortly after the Exodus. In Jesus, that shekinah glory became incarnate, and now the glory was passing to Jesus’ followers as they were united with and indwelt by him. One commentator recalled a friend in ministry who once wrote, “Child of God, don’t you know only you share the glow. It’s a light from within, when the blood covers sin. It’s the wonderful glory of God.”

Believer, Jesus prays for you to share in the glory of God. The glory that exists in the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. That is an amazing thought. A major facet of Jesus’ relationship with God is the “glory” which emanates from it. Since Jesus’ work was aimed at glorifying God, mutual indwelling will mean that the disciples will continue that work, glorifying Jesus and God. It is Jesus’ intention that his followers will share in this glory (v. 22), so that God may be glorified in this world.

We read about this in 2 Corinthians 3:18 – “<sup>18</sup> And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

How comforting is it that Christ prays for us? The Great High Priest prays for those who are saved by Him. Listen to this description of Jesus from Hebrews 5:24-25 – “but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. <sup>25</sup> Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”

Christian, Jesus always lives to make intercession for you. You who have been saved. You whose hearts are surrendered to Christ. If that is you, know that Jesus has prayed and is praying for you. Even when we fail to remember that He prays for us, He is praying for us. In Luke 22:31-32 Jesus says to Peter, “<sup>31</sup> “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, <sup>32</sup> but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.” Here is the glorious promise that Jesus prays for our faith, that it would not fail. Even when we stumble, Christ is praying for us. It would be amazing enough if Jesus prayed for us one time in regard to

something we are experiencing or going through. But we learn here that he prays for us, for me and for you, *continuously*. Brothers and sisters, this is awesome! Our King, our God, our Creator, Our Savior prays for us. Be encouraged and comforted if you are in Christ.

And if you are not a believer and have not been truly born again, may today be the day of your salvation. Surrender to Jesus and discover the joy of knowing that you are being interceded for before the Living God, by the Lord Jesus Christ. Who was and is the ultimate righteous man. And the prayer of a righteous man has great power.

Let's pray.