



Parkway Fellowship

6 TRUTHS YOU CAN COUNT ON • UNITED WE STAND • JOHN 17:20-23; JOHN 18:37-38 •
9/20/2020

MAIN POINT

One of the ways Christians set themselves apart is by considering the interests of others ahead of their own.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

When have you worked in a group to accomplish a common goal? What was it like collaborating with people with different beliefs, ideas, and experiences? What were the biggest obstacles? What were the biggest victories?

Why is unity so important when working in a group setting?

With whom do you feel the greatest sense of unity right now?

One horse can pull 8,000 pounds alone, but when it works together with another horse, it doesn't just double the amount it can pull. Together, two horses can actually pull up to 24,000 pounds—3 times the weight that one can pull alone. There's a great lesson about working together in unity! But working together in unity is easier said than done, especially in the increasingly polarized culture we live in today. So what does the Bible teach us about being united with other people?

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JOHN 18:37B-38A.

What might Pilate's question, "What is truth?" reveal about him?

What would you say to someone who asked you, "What is truth?" How does your answer relate to what Jesus said in verse 37?

Truth is frequently sacrificed on the altar of expediency. Many politically oriented people pretend they are interested in the truth. But Pilate summarized his politically oriented life pattern with the haunting question: "What is truth?" The implications of that question are exceedingly far-reaching for any person. Pilate found Jesus innocent. Instead of simply dismissing the case as a good judge interested in integrity should have done following his verdict of innocence, Pilate devised a scheme using Barabbas to deal with any potential fallout he thought might occur. Pilate's scheme involved giving the people a predetermined choice he thought they could not refuse. He was clearly wrong.

How do you respond to Jesus' statement, "Everyone on the side of truth listens to me"?

Why do people have such a hard time accepting that absolute truth exists? What does absolute truth have to do with unity or disunity?

| HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 17:20-23.

Scan back through the passage leading up to these verses. What was the context in which Jesus said this?

Of all the things Jesus could have prayed for, why do you think He chose to pray for unity?

What, according to Jesus, is the effect of a unified church?

Unity is an incredibly powerful testimony to those outside looking in. When the church is unified around truth and mission, it demonstrates to a skeptical world the validity and power of their faith. The church is meant to be where people, of all different kinds and varieties, might come together under the message and mission of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When there is disunity, the world around wonders whether the message of the church is truly real or not.

Does unity mean there is absolute agreement on everything? Why or why not?

Why is humility an essential element to this kind of unity?

What does it mean to consider someone "more significant than" yourself (Phil. 2:3)?

Where can we find the kind of motivation we need to truly consider others better than ourselves?

Paul was asking His followers to do something contrary to fallen human nature. We are, in our sin, preconditioned to think of ourselves first and foremost. To think of another as better than ourselves is an attribute that can only come from a heart changed by the gospel.

How did Jesus demonstrate this kind of thinking?

How might considering the gospel, again and again, lead to true humility?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

In this week's message, we learned these verses apply to us and the lack of unity in our country in the following three ways: Love people more than your position. Make your relationship with God active. Your commitment to unity is directly related to your commitment to reach people far from God. Which of these stands out to you as something you especially need to give attention to? Why?

How hard or easy will it be to pray for people of another position and do so genuinely? What will be challenging about this?

What habit can you start that will make your relationship with God more active?

PRAYER

Thank God for the unifying work of Jesus on your behalf. Ask the Lord to create a spirit of unity around the mandate to share the gospel with all kinds of people in this world where people see truth as relative.

COMMENTARY

| JOHN 17:20-23

17:20-21. If we had any doubt that this prayer applies to believers today, it is erased by verse 20. The heart of this final paragraph of the chapter focuses on unity—the ultimate demonstration of God's work through his people in the world. We learn here that body unity is patterned after divine unity. The absolute oneness of the Father and the Son will now be spiritually transferred to believers for a specific purpose—spiritual unity. The union of the church is not patterned after some earthly organization or any well-meaning intentions of humanity. God joins our spirits through the Holy Spirit because Jesus' blood is "thicker than water" and thicker than human bonds. Perhaps there is no verse in all of Scripture that has been more frequently quoted to

support ecclesiastical church union than John 17:21. However, the emphasis of the prayer centers in spiritual unity, not organizational unity. It must be understood in the light of John 10:30, "I and my Father are one." If we are to understand the unity of the church, we must first understand unity between the Son and the Father.

17:22. Christian unity is facilitated by glory, first given to Christ, and then in turn to the disciples. Glory in this context is not an absolute attribute of God but a relative possession that can be reassigned to believers. Some interpreters see heaven here, but there would be no point in such a futuristic view with respect to the mission statement of verse 23: "to let the world know that you sent me." Peter wrote that the divine nature was already in us as a result of regeneration, so we already have a measure of the glory of Jesus himself.

17:23. We also learn in this passage that body unity is a witness to the world. Like a set of matched mixing bowls, we are the smaller one that fits into Christ who fits into the Father. Purpose? To let the world know that you sent me. Mixing bowls may provide too mundane a metaphor here, but Jesus' teaching about the vine and the branches in chapter 15 is affirmed by this prayer of chapter 17. The unity of believers calls forth recognition of God's hand by observers in the world even while the church is on earth. Just a few hours before this prayer, Jesus told the disciples, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (13:35).

| JOHN 18:33-40

18:33-37. The incredulous Pilate could not imagine this broken and beaten man before him was the king of the Jews. But Jesus would not give him the satisfaction of claiming or disclaiming such an office. All this turned Pilate's disdain for the Jews up another notch in verse 35. He characterized this entire trial as petty religious bickering among these Jews whom he was authorized to control. Verses 36-37 offer poignant truth from the lips of the Lord. All earthly kingdoms find their source with sinful humanity, but Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. It needs no human defense. Jesus was not referring to the ultimate millennial kingdom; his spiritual kingdom of truth represents the lordship of the King over the lives of his people. Who forms this kingdom? Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice, said Jesus. Once again Jesus set truth as the dividing standard for right and wrong. But if truth was all he cared about, he posed no threat to Rome. Pilate would have to weasel out of this situation in some other way.

18:38-40. In effect, Pilate declared Jesus innocent. Nevertheless, to appease the Jews, he let them select a prisoner of choice for release at the Passover. In this chapter we see intelligent and religious people warped by hate. We also see a fascinating play on the name Bar-Abbas, which

means "son of the father." One son of a father was released, and the other, Son of the Father, went to death row.