

The Lord's Prayer, Part III – John 17:20-26

Main Idea: Christ is our only High Priest, Savior, King, and Lord!

I. The Church | John 17:20-21

Having begun with a call for His own consecration (1-5) and continued with His prayer for the eleven disciples (6-19), **Jesus concludes His High Priestly prayer with petitions aimed specifically at His universal flock that will follow in generations to come** (20-26). People often wonder where they fit into what they are reading in their study of Scripture. As we conclude our study of the Lord's High Priestly Prayer, it is not challenging to apply the message to ourselves since Jesus prays explicitly for today's believers. If you are a true believer, you must realize that on the night of His arrest, Jesus prayed specifically for your blessing as a member of His church (universal church). As the One and only High Priest, Jesus did entirely and once and for all what the high priests in the OT did partially and temporarily (Heb. 1:1-4; 7:13-17). This is why we have no priest at TCC because **no one other than Christ has the right to be called priest**. The ministry of an earthly priest is thus unnecessary and, if unnecessary, wrong. John 17 shows us that **Christ is our only High Priest, Savior, King, and Lord!** And hours before He delivered Himself to the Jews and Romans, God the Son, He who "was in the beginning with God," He who is God, and who "without Him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:1) prays for all who will come to believe in Him (the totality of human beings who will inhabit heaven).

Jesus' emphasis on His universal flock that would span the generations after His coming was not a thought He had only recently expressed. Throughout His ministry, Jesus had spoken in such terms, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:14-16). While standing in the temple with His hands outstretched toward the nation of Israel, our Lord immediately expanded His outreach. This emphasis on a great worldwide flock is seen from the beginning of Jesus' ministry. When He was rejected after preaching His inaugural sermon in His hometown of Nazareth, Jesus reminded His hearers that in the time of Elijah and Elisha, God had responded to hard hearts in Israel by sending His grace to Gentiles (who have always been a part of His redemptive plan). From the very beginning, Jesus knew that He was fulfilling God's original promise to Abraham in the covenant of grace: "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). This means that **it has always been the sovereign purpose of the triune God to call and gather one flock through all ages for God's glory by redeeming a people with His atoning blood**. Therefore, Jesus' prayer in John 17 is a specific, definite, and sufficient prayer for all the redeemed by His blood (both Jews and Gentiles).

Earlier in His prayer, Jesus had asked the Father to make His flock holy and protect it from corruption in the world (V.14-16). Believers are called and guided (by the Spirit of Truth) to resist worldliness as they join the body of Christ through faith in Him. Jesus also prayed that the Father would sanctify His flock "in the truth" of His Word (V.17). Now, Jesus tells us that in praying for His universal flock, He refers to "those who will believe in me through [the apostles' word]" (V.20). **One may join an earthly church congregation in a variety of ways, but there is only one way to join Christ's flock of redeemed and holy believers: by knowing and believing the Word of God as given through the apostles of Christ**. The way to build and grow Christ's flock is by the preaching and teaching of Scripture. People today are added to Christ's flock in the same way: Peter said, "You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23).

To Ponder:

1. How do I know I am a part of Christ's flock?
2. What does it mean for Christ to have one flock?
3. If Christ's flock does not stop at TCC, how can we collaborate with other like-minded churches in our area?
4. What are some determining factors that would keep us (TCC) from collaborating with other churches?

II. The Unity | John 17:22-23

As He continues His prayer, Jesus sets forth His vision for His flock. He wants His people to be in unity. The topic of unity has seen significant attention in recent decades. We are constantly reading about it and also observing the presence of division even among believers and evangelical churches—**the first step in pursuing Christian unity is to define what unity is not.** Many assume that Jesus refers to an outward, physical, and organizational agreement (unanimity). This is the position of the Roman Catholic Church, which insists that Christian unity demands institutional and bureaucratic oneness. Yet, in looking at the early church in the book of Acts, we see the greatest spiritual vitality without a clear structural hierarchy. In fact, **the worst periods of church history have been those with the strongest institutional unity.** Reflecting on the NT generally, we may see unity as *organic*. **The unity that Jesus defines in His prayer is patterned on the unity within the Godhead,** “The glory that you have given me I have given them, that they may be one even as we are one” (V.22). We see the unity designed by God expressed by Paul when writing to the church in Corinth, “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ” (1 Cor. 12:12). Jesus Himself also expressed His desire for His flock when He said: “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35). **Christian unity thus involves an organic oneness of knowledge and service.** The church’s unity authenticates the Father’s love for the Son and for believers. **A church where there are carnal divisions, strife, backbiting, and gossip drives unbelievers away, and becomes a stumbling block for the Gospel.**

Second, we should observe that not only is church unity *organic*, but it is also *spiritual*. Jesus’ prayer describes our unity by saying to the Father, “I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one” (V. 23). If we ask how the Father is in the Son, the answer is complex. But if we ask how the Son is in His flock, the answer is clear: through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (John 14). This is exactly what Paul expresses to the church in Ephesus: “I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:1-3). This unity cannot be legislated or brought about by any human organization, but rather a oneness created by the unifying presence of God the Holy Spirit. Third, having unity in the Spirit, believers are united in *the truth*. We know that the Spirit indwells those who know and believe in God’s written Word. **A mistake commonly made in pursuing Christian unity is to set aside matters of truth in order to gain unity.** This is, however, a denial of Jesus’ teaching, as well as of His example throughout the Gospels. Jesus said that when the Spirit came, He would lead His church in the truth (John 16:13). God’s truth alone will sanctify His flock. **The unity that our Lord was concerned about is a spiritual unity in the truth of His Word.**

To Ponder:

1. Why is unity in the church a powerful testimony to the Gospel?
2. How can unity with other believers (and churches) in Christ affect the way you engage in God’s mission?
3. What steps can you take today to live in unity with other believers?

III. The Future Glory | John 17:24-25

In working out the significance of Christian unity, Jesus highlights reasons why believers should prize and serve the cause of oneness in the church, “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me...” (V.24). **Finally, Jesus sets forth the crowning gift that He has prepared for His people—eternal life.** God made all mankind to be glory-seekers, for He said, “Let us make man in our image” (Gen.1:26). God is Himself a glory-seeker, and He made man to revel in and reflect His glory. Naturally, we crave glory! **The tragedy of mankind is not that we constantly seek glory. Rather, the tragedy is that we seek the false glory of sin and the desires of our flesh.** While in sin, we crave glory that comes from the world. In Christ, we begin to seek and reflect His glory! Being in Christ changes everything in the life of a believer. **What more powerful demonstration of God’s love for His people could it be than of the Son, while knowing us, still loves us as the Father loves Him** (V.26). The God of the universe, needless, all-powerful, and all-knowing, loves you because you are in Christ. As we eavesdrop on Jesus’ prayer to the Father, we are shown that the source of our hope for glory and the true source of our assurance in salvation will never be found within ourselves. In John 17, Jesus places the capstone in the bridge that will lead His flock into heaven. Our hope of salvation is held up by nothing less than the saving will of God the Son, for the people given to Him by the Father. When we realize our blessed reliance on the intercessory ministry of Christ, our High Priest, we perceive the vital significance of the glory that awaits us in heaven.

To Ponder:

1. What was the greatest lesson you learned from John 17?