

## INTRODUCTION

We live in what is called the United States of America but we have become the divided states. Everywhere you look there is division—there is political division with each candidate promising to unite the nation. We've seen an ugly surge of racial division. There are divisions in homes and families.

In 1858 Abraham Lincoln was running for the U.S. Senate in Illinois against the incumbent, Stephen Douglas. In one of the seven debates, Lincoln quoted the words of Jesus from Luke 3:25. He said, "A house divided by itself cannot stand." Lincoln lost the Senate race to Douglas, but his speeches made him famous and he was elected as President just two years later. And indeed, he presided over a divided nation until an assassin shot him in 1865.

And we are a divided nation today. In many ways we are a divided city. The old devil may not be smart in every field of mathematics but he excels at long division. Satan is the great divider. God wants people to be united. That's why on the night before the crucifixion, Jesus prayed for His church to be unified. We've been studying this prayer for the past two weeks. This is the longest and most beautiful recorded prayer of Jesus in the Bible.

But this is more than just a prayer. As we are allowed to listen to words of Jesus that He spoke to His Father, there is powerful theology in this prayer. For instance consider these two claims. In His prayer, Jesus taught us the definition of eternal life. In John 17:3 He says, "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent —Jesus Christ."

Then in John 17:17 Jesus reveals to us the source of truth. He prayed, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." In a culture that says that truth is relative, Jesus pronounced that God's Word is truth.

Many Bible scholars agree that this high priestly prayer of Jesus is so holy that when we approach it we should remove our shoes because we are standing on holy ground. Let's eavesdrop again on the prayer Jesus prayed on the night before the cross.

John 17:20-26: "I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word. May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me. I have given them the glory you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me, so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me.

"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they will see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the world's foundation. Righteous Father, the world has not known you. However, I have known you, and they have known that you sent me. I made your name known to them and will continue to

make it known, so that the love you have loved me with may be in them and I may be in them."

In the first five verses of John 17, Jesus prayed for Himself to be glorified. In the next fourteen verses Jesus prayed for His disciples to be sanctified, and Michael preached last week about how we are IN the world, but we are not OF the world. In these last seven verses, Jesus prayed for us, the Church. He prayed for all of us who would believe because of the testimony of the original disciples. And Jesus made three prayer requests for us. Isn't it exciting to know that you and I can be the answer to Jesus' prayer? Let's examine these three requests.

### **1. JESUS PRAYED WE WILL KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT.**

In this prayer, Jesus prayed four times that we would be ONE even as He and the Father are one. In John 17: 22 He prayed, "I am in them and you are in me, so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know you have sent me."

If you are going to understand what unity is, you need to know what it's not.

#### **(1) Unity is not uniformity (sameness).**

Some organizations need uniformity, that's why they have uniforms. The military creates uniformity. But there are some churches that mistake uniformity with unity. They think every Christian should dress a certain way, worship a certain way, and use only one translation of the Bible. I've heard that there is a church here in Texas that has a barbershop so that when a man gets saved, they give him a Christian haircut.

No, there is great diversity in unity. I love the fact that we have so many different kinds of people in our church. We have long hairs, short hairs, and no hairs. We have people wearing clothes from Neiman Marcus sitting next to people in shorts and sandals. We have white collars, blue collars, and no collars. Unity isn't uniformity.

#### **(2) Unity is not unification (human effort).**

There have always been man-made efforts to bring together all the different religions. There is a Bahia Temple in Chicago with nine doors, eight represent the major religions of the world, and the ninth is a DIY, a "do-it-yourself" door. This movement teaches that there are many pathways to God.

Maybe you seen the bumper sticker that says, COEXIST. I don't really have anything against it. The characters represent the crescent of Islam, the peace symbol for pacifism, the symbol for sexual rights, the star of David for Judaism, the Wiccan or witchcraft symbol of the pentagram that dots the eye, and then finally, the cross for Christianity.

It's ironic if you study the history of this image, those who have used it have had a hard time co-existing with each other. It was first created in the year 2000 by a Polish artist for an art

show in Jerusalem. A couple of years later some students at the University of Indiana stole it and claimed the copyright. Later Bono and U2 started wearing it. Several fashion lines sued to obtain the copyright. And the poor Polish artist wasn't getting a penny. None of these fighting parties could even coexist with each other. Finally after years of contentious lawsuits and millions of dollars of legal bills, the Polish artist finally got the credit he deserved.

While I believe we should show respect to all religions, the idea of mixing them all together isn't unity. It's unification. Jesus isn't one of the ways to heaven. He claimed to be the only way to Heaven.

### **(3) Unity is our shared connection in Christ.**

There are two expressions of the Church. There is the Church which is comprised of all believers in every nation. He prayed for there to be unity in the global church. And He prayed for there to be unity in the local church. We don't have a lot of control over global unity, but we can all participate in the unity of our local church. The first thing we must understand about Christian unity is that it is an act of the Holy Spirit. We cannot create unity—we can only keep it or kill it. That's why Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:2-6: "Bearing with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all."

Our call is to KEEP the unity that the Spirit creates. We can't create it, we can only corrupt it. I've always discovered an immediate bond with a believer when I visit a foreign country. Now I'm proud to be a Texan. I wasn't born here but like the coffee cup in my office says, I got here as fast as I could. But I've got to admit that I get along a lot better with a Chinese Christian than with a Texan who doesn't know Jesus. I've been to Africa many times, and I have an immediate bond with my African brothers and sisters than I do with a neighbor down the street who doesn't know Jesus. It's the unity of the Spirit.

And I don't know if there's life on other planets, but if there is, our God created them, and if there is a Christian Klingon, I would get along better with them than we with a Texan who doesn't know Jesus. That's what the unity of the Spirit is all about.

But churches can argue over the most minor issues. I've heard of churches splitting over the color of the carpet. Jerry Clower used to tell the story about his home church having a business meeting to buy a new chandelier. There was a motion and a second. But uncle Versey Leadbetter stood up and said, "I'm against it for three reasons. First, I don't think we need to install anything that none of us can spell. Second, if we got us one of them chandeliers, nobody would know how to play it. And third, what we really need in this room is more light.

When churches argue it destroys the testimony of that church. I could take you to a city in Alabama at show you a church named Harmony Baptist Church. But they didn't have much harmony because they were always fussing and fighting. So, a group broke away and built a new church just down the road. They named it New Harmony Baptist Church. But they had

problems too, so a group left that church and built a new church. Guess what they named it? Greater New Harmony Baptist Church.

It takes more than a name on a church for harmony; it requires the work of the Holy Spirit to create that harmony and it takes each one of us to maintain the unity of the church. And when we demonstrate unity Jesus said that's when the world will realize God sent Jesus. The second prayer request for us is that:

## **2. JESUS PRAYED WE WILL BE WITH HIM TO SEE HIS GLORY.**

To me, these are some of the most touching words Jesus prayed. He knew He was dying and going to glory, and He was leaving us behind to live in a world that would hate us. So, He prayed for us for the time when we would join Him in Heaven. In John 17:24 He prayed, "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they will see my glory."

Charles Spurgeon was called the Prince of Preachers in London in the 1800s. He preached in a time when preaching was eloquent oratory. I don't really speak that way, but I love to read the way Spurgeon described this verse: Charles Spurgeon wrote: "He did not say he wished his people to be in heaven; but WITH HIM IN HEAVEN, because that makes heaven heaven. There shall we have no fields to till, no garment to spin, no wearied limb, no dark distress, no burning thirst, no pangs of hunger, no weepings of bereavement; we shall have nought to do or think upon, but for ever to gaze upon that Sun of Righteousness, to be satisfied forever with his favor, and full with the goodness of the Lord! Oh! if we have only to die to get to such delights as these, death is gain, it is swallowed up in victory!" That's why Paul could write, "For to me, to live is Christ, but to die is gain."

How do we know Jesus wants His children in Heaven? There are three reasons in John. (1) Because of the price Jesus paid in John 3:14 He said, "As Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up so that whoever believes in him shall have eternal life." (2) Because of the promise Jesus made in John 14:1 when He said, "In my Father's house are many rooms, I'm going there to prepare a place for you." And (3) Because of the prayer Jesus prayed. Jesus prayed here in John 17:24. He said, "Father, I want those you have given me to be where I am."

This world is a crazy place. There are so many ways that we suffer. Right now, people are suffering physically, emotionally, financially, and relationally. This world is a place of suffering. That's why Jesus prayed that we would be with Him one day. The Apostle Paul summed it up when he wrote in Romans 8:18: For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.

But there's a third prayer request that Jesus prayed for you.

### **3. JESUS PRAYED WE WILL BE FILLED WITH HIS LOVE.**

These final words at the end of the prayer are filled with important truth. In fact, we find a perfect summary of the Christian life in the last five words of Jesus' prayer.

In John 17:26 Jesus prayed, "I made your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love you have loved me with may be in them and I may be in them." (John 17:26) Keep that slide up for a minute. The last five words of Jesus' prayer is the key to the Christian life. Jesus prayed, "I may be in them." The secret of the Christian life is the indwelling Christ. It is Christ in you the Hope of glory. Christ with you is comforting. Christ with you is reassuring, but Christ IN you is revolutionary.

Paul prayed a similar prayer to Jesus in Ephesians 3:16-19: "I pray that he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love, and to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

So how do we maintain this unity? By looking to Jesus as our author and finisher of our faith. Don't look at me or any other man or woman for your model for unity. Look to Jesus.

### **CONCLUSION**

A.W. Tozer wrote that you can have 100 pianos in a large hall. You can tune the first piano, and then if you tune the second piano to the first, and the third to the second, and all the way to the 100<sup>th</sup> piano, those 100 pianos would be out of tune and the result would be ear-screaming disharmony.

On the other hand, if you tune each of those 100 pianos to a single tuning fork, all 100 pianos would produce beautiful music in harmony. What's the lesson? You don't model your life after me, or her, or him. Our model is Jesus. He is our tuning fork. And when I'm in tune with Him I will be in tune with you. That's the way unity works.

Warren Wiersbe wrote about a little girl in Montana who wandered away from her village before a snowstorm. The family sounded the alarm and the entire village turned out to search for the lost child, shouting her name. The falling snow kept covering the tracks.

After several hours someone suggested that they form a human line holding hands and walk through every field surrounding the village. And eventually they found the girl but it was too late, she was frozen. The grieving father said, "Oh, if we had only joined hands sooner!"

There's a lesson from that tragic story. There are thousands of men, women, and students in East Texas who are lost without Jesus. We just join our hearts and hands to show the world

that God sent Jesus. When they see how we display the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, they will believe our message.

Green Acres has something very valuable. Not every church has it. I'm not talking about the buildings, or the programs, or the amazing volunteers. We have the beautiful unity of the Spirit. Jesus prayed for us to have it. I want you and I to do our part to keep it. I pray that we will be a church that isn't frozen together with formalism, or wired together by organization, or roped together by programs. I pray that we will be a church that is melted together by the love of God found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We all pray, but today, I want you to focus on being the answer to Jesus' prayer. He prayed three things for you: Will you keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? Will you trust Him so you can be where He is for all eternity. Will you allow Jesus to fill you with the Love of the Father?

## OUTLINE

### 1. JESUS PRAYED WE WILL KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT.

"I am in them and you are in me, so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know you have sent me." *John 17:22-23 CSB*

- (1) Unity is not uniformity (sameness).
- (2) Unity is not unification (human effort).
- (3) Unity is our shared connection in Christ.

### 2. JESUS PRAYED WE WILL BE WITH HIM TO SEE HIS GLORY.

"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they will see my glory." *John 17:24 CSB*

### 3. JESUS PRAYED WE WILL BE FILLED WITH HIS LOVE.

"I made your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love you have loved me with may be in them and I may be in them." *John 17:26 CSB*

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



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