



# river west church

How Jesus Prays for His Church

Jon 17:20-26

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It is the Sunday after Easter and I sense that many of us continue to bask in the glow of our celebration from last weekend. This makes sense. Good Friday and Easter Sunday take us to the very heart of our Christian faith. Jesus suffered and died for our sins. He walked a road of betrayal, denial, loneliness, accusation, suffering, crucifixion, and death. The power of this sacrifice can never be overstated.

But then, God raised Jesus from the dead. He lives! He reigns! Jesus sits right now on a throne at the right hand of the Father. What is He doing? He is praying for us (Heb. 7:25). Did you know that? Jesus intercedes continually for the community that He ransomed. I wonder if we ever really stop to consider this truth.

Would you like to know how Jesus prays for us, what He asks for when He advocates to the Father on our behalf? What is Jesus' heart for us? What does He desire for His people? The bible answers these questions in John's gospel, and I cannot think of a more appropriate theme to focus on in the afterglow of Easter.

## **Jesus Prays for Unity**

John 17 is a spectacular passage because we get to eaves-drop on 26 verses of Jesus praying. Near the end of the passage (vss. 20-26), Jesus prays for future believers, and the heart of the request involves unity. Jesus asks "that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us" (vs. 21). Two verses later He prays "that they may become perfectly one" (vs. 23). This is remarkable. Jesus intends for his church to enjoy a stunning kind of unity in our relationships. In fact, it is an "oneness" that can only be compared to the unity that He enjoys with the Father (c.f. 17:11). Does that sound completely unrealistic? That may be the very point.

Jesus' prayer reveals a kind of unity that cannot result from human effort or ingenuity. This morning, we are going to learn that real Christian unity is a gift, a miracle that God works in His people as their eyes are lifted off of themselves, their circumstances and agendas, and onto Jesus and His glory. "The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one" (vs. 22). Jesus has provided what is necessary for His people to be truly one. Our job is to live out that unity, to maintain and to express it (Eph. 4:3).

## **Jesus Prays for Persuasion**

In the Bible, it is often the little words that carry the most freight. In John 17, the simple little words "so that" could not be more significant. They appear two times, and both times they point us to Jesus' purpose for His community. "That they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me" (vs. 23). As Christians, we should obsess over this verse. What is the purpose of the body of Christ, the church? Why did Jesus leave us in the world? Why do our relationships with one another matter? Because we are to carry on the mission that Jesus started. We are to be the visible expression of the invisible God. How will this happen? It will happen through our relationships; through our unity. Jesus prays for a persuasive community. He intends for His church to display a genuine love and oneness that is so compelling, so un-worldly, that the only possible explanation is that Jesus truly is the revealer whom the Father sent.

This morning River West church has gathered. We have gathered to worship, to pray, to fellowship, and to study God's Word. But, according to Jesus, we have also gathered to "gospel". Our gathering serves to proclaim the truth of Jesus through a living display of the love and fellowship that characterizes the God we profess. May the LORD bless us richly today with a unifying vision of the glory of His Son, Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit.