

John 17:6-26

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[0 : 0 0] John Sandin. And it's our third sermon. Our final one on John Sandin.! But there was no reply.

He came back 10 or 15 minutes later. Knocked on the door again. But there was still no reply.

Presuming that the king was still asleep. He came back later again.

And still no reply. By this time he's a little bit concerned. Knowing that king is a fragile state of health. And even though it was not allowed for him to enter the king's presence.

Without the king's permission. The valet opened the door. And went in to find King George VI. That is Queen Elizabeth's father. On his knees praying.

And the sim hurriedly withdrew. And came back a little bit later. The king. Was on his knees praying.

[1 : 2 2] The valet expected when he returned. A reprimand for the gate crashing. On the king's early morning devotions. But the king said this. He said remember.

If you ever find me like that again. There is always room for you at the throne. So come and join me. I hope that's a true story.

My fear is it might be a preacher's story. But I hope it's a true story. But that really is the message of John 17. And that's why Jesus prays. So to be overheard.

By his disciples. To stumble across a man on his knees. Is something. Isn't it? To hear what a man is saying to God. Is holy ground. To find a king.

On his knees. Talking to the king of kings. You don't want to intrude on him. But here is the son of God. Talking to his father. And he invites you.

[2 : 1 8] To listen in. To his prayer. And as I say. It's the high priestly prayer. The high priest. In Israel. Once a year. Would go. Into the temple. And before.

Offering the sacrifice. He would pray. He would pray for himself. When he went. Into the temple. And then he would pray. For his fellow priests. And then he would pray. For the whole nation of Israel.

And so. I think you see that model. Of the Lord Jesus. Our great high priest. First of all. In the first one. To find he prays for himself. And the prayer there. Is glorify me. And then he prays.

For the eleven disciples. His apostles. Who he is sending out. Into the world. With his message.

And he prays. Doesn't he. Protect them. From the world. They are in the world.

But protect them. From the world. And now. He prays for his church. Right down. Through the centuries. Right around the globe. Look at verse 20. I do not ask for these only.

[3 : 1 6] These eleven. But also. For those who will believe in me. Throughout. Through their word. That's the message. And that's you and me.

That's why we're here. This morning. The reason. This church exists. Is because we have. Believed the message. Of the apostles. Someone has.

Passed it on to us. And we have believed it. And so Jesus. The night before he goes to the cross. Has got you on his mind. You were always on his mind.

He's got you. In his thoughts. And he carries you. In his heart. And he is praying. For you. And so what is he praying for? What does Jesus pray.

For his church? What does Jesus pray. For us. As believers? Well number one. He wants us to be united on earth. And number two.

[4 : 1 6] He wants us to be with him. And number three. He wants the world to know. There's your three points. He wants us firstly. To be united on earth. So four times.

In four verses. He prays. That they may be one. The first thing to say. About that is. It's a prayer. It's not a policy statement.

It's not a draft proposal. The Bible says. In James. Doesn't it? The fervent. Prayer. The effectual prayer.

Of a righteous man. Avails much. The fervent prayer. Of a righteous man. Does it? Does it? Does it?

Does it? Do it? Do it? the prophet Elijah. Elijah is on Mount Carmel. And he is saying the fervent, effectual prayer of a righteous man, it carries a lot of weight with God. A fervent prayer of a godly man carries a lot of weight with God. But here's not a righteous man like Elijah. Here is the righteous man. Luther calls him the proper man. The proper man. He's praying for us.

[5 : 37] And what he prays for, I mean, there's not a chance, is that? There's not a chance that Jesus' prayer is not going to be answered. And so what I'm trying to say to you, and I want you to gasp, is this unity, this is not a proposal that you find somewhere in the Bible. We're not told to manufacture or create this unity. We're just told that we have to keep it.

We have to maintain it because the unity that Jesus is praying for here already exists. It's one of the perks of being a Christian, isn't it? One of the great perks of being a Christian is you can go to anywhere in the world. You can go to America or Iran. You can go to Africa or Scotland.

You can go to Asia. You can go into Anglicanism. You can go into Pentecostalism or the Baptists or the Presby's. You can go anywhere and there is instantly a oneness with fellow believers, isn't there?

And so when we come to this passage, often people want to talk about denominations. I think it's got very little to do with what Jesus is praying for in John 17.

What he's talking about is this profound, vital unity, spiritual unity with all believers that we have.

[7 : 07] Down through the centuries, across the ages and across the world. And we can't produce that. I can't produce that.

We can only protect it. We can only give expression to it. And that's what Jesus says here. This is a unity that needs to be seen by the world. And he gives us the model for that here.

Look at verse 21. I do not ask for these only, verse 20, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

And so, he's speaking about the apostles, whom this message will go out into all the world. And he prays for those of us who are in Ealing this morning on November the 27th, 2022.

And he says, I am praying that they may be one, as we are one, Father. Or in verse 22, the glory that you've given me, I've given them, that they may be one, even as we are one.

[8 : 18] So, can you see, it's an organic oneness, not an organizational oneness. It's not the oneness of a graveyard.

And there's a unity in a graveyard, isn't there? Martin I. Jones said about the ecumenical movement and the World Council of Churches, he said, putting all the ecclesiastical corpses into one graveyard will not bring about a resurrection.

So, we're not talking about us all getting together and working at policy statements. And negotiating mergers and agreements and kind of going on walks.

We're not talking about that. It's not going to convince anyone of anything. But when the world sees this kind of oneness, this spiritual, vital oneness, do you remember what Jesus says in John's Gospel?

He says, by this, all men will know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another. That's the kind of oneness that he's talking about in John 17.

[9 : 24] What does it look like on the ground? It's a hugely powerful thing. This is what Jesus is envisaging. Jesus doesn't die disappointed. Jesus doesn't die, you know, really disappointed that he's got this huge vision of a united people in a divided world and it's just been ruined.

No. He doesn't die disappointed. This oneness, the world cannot produce it. The most that the world can do is come up with a kind of cessation of hostilities.

But it can't produce a oneness like this. So what does it look like that they may be one as we are one? Let me just say a couple of things about that.

He's talking about the oneness in the Godhead. So children, how many persons are there in the Godhead? Three. How many gods are there?

One. There's one God, isn't there? And so you have this oneness in the Godhead. First thing I think on this is there's this face-to-faceness in the Godhead.

[10 : 40] The kind of oneness that Jesus wants the world to see is a face-to-faceness. So John's gospel begins with, in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God.

The word was with God. It's literally the word is towards God. God literally towards God. That is how God has existed from all eternity. The Father and the Son face-to-face. And Jesus is saying, I want my people, your people, to be like that.

I want there to be a face-to-faceness. Not ships passing in the night. Not people attending a meeting, just hearing a preacher. But delighting in each other's company.

The Father and the Son. The Father's heart going out to His Son. The Son glorifying His Father. I want them to be like that.

[11 : 45] And so it's a face-to-faceness. And that doesn't mean that we're going to all be exactly the same. Because we know, don't we, that within the Godhead there's not only a face-to-faceness, but there's a unity and diversity.

Trinity. So the one God that we believe in is Trinity, children. Do you remember? The three persons of the Godhead. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And that is a mystery.

We don't understand how that can be. I don't understand how that can be. But it is a mystery. That is how God exists. He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father is not the Son.

The Son is not the Father. The Holy Spirit is not the Son nor the Father. Three distinct persons and yet one God. I want them to be like that.

I don't want them to be clones. All dressed in the same way. With the same haircut. Same cheesy grin. I want them to be one as we are one.

[12 : 44] We've got to be careful here, haven't we? I know that. But when God sends a snowstorm, each snowflake is different.

What do human beings do? We make ice cubes, don't we? We pour the water in and there's a mold. They come out exactly the same. It's the difference, isn't it, between Christianity and the cults. You see the Mormons coming a mile off, don't you? They all dress exactly the same way. They've all got the same haircuts. The JW's, you can recognize them. There are some branches of the Christian church that are like that, aren't they?

Especially kind of legalistic churches. You've got the rules and the regulations that you have to abide by. We all look the same. The world isn't very impressed by that. The world is spooked out by that. But the kind of oneness that Jesus is talking about and praying for and wanting to see is a unity in diversity.

A variety of ministries taking place. A variety of gifts being used. Different personalities in this small congregation. And Jesus says, I want them to be one as we are one.

[14 : 01] A face-to-faceness. A unity in diversity. And then it's a working oneness, isn't it? It's a working relationship in the Godhead. Sometimes we oversimplify it.

We say, well, the Father plans our salvation. The Son carries it out. And the Holy Spirit applies it. It's not as simple as that, is it? All three persons of the Godhead are involved in our salvation. You see that in the baptism of the Lord Jesus famously. Where Jesus is in the Jordan River. And Jesus lines up. He joins the queue of sinners. He stands in the way of sinners to be baptized by John.

And he identifies with those he has come to save. Do you remember as he comes out of the water at that very moment. Where he sets out on that road that will lead him to the cross.

Where he will die for those sinners he's standing in line with. It all starts, doesn't it? Age 30, in that Jordan River. He identifies himself publicly with sinners.

[15 : 09] And when John says, no, no, no, this shouldn't happen. Jesus says, no, all righteousness must be fulfilled. This is the right thing to do, John. This is the reason why I have come. To identify with sinners.

And do you remember as he does that, what happens? The heavens open. And the Holy Spirit comes down in the shape of a dove. And the voice of the Father is heard from heaven saying, This is my son.

My beloved son with whom I'm well pleased. That's my boy. And I'm pleased for you. Go for it, son. Go on. Do you see the encouragement of the Father to the Son at his baptism? Do you see that? And Jesus says, I want my followers, my people to be one like that.

I want IPC to be a church like that. Encouraging one another. So how many ministers? How many elders? How many Sunday school teachers?

[16:14] How many house group leaders? How many deacons? How many English class teachers? How many helpers in Little Stars? And youth group leaders are on the verge of giving up for lack of encouragement.

A phone call or an email. A text message. When did you last pat someone on the shoulder and say, That's my boy. Go on.

When did you last think of other ministries in London? And churches in London? And you say, I'm so glad people are there doing that. Did you tell them?

Or are we all in competition with each other? Rival brands. But they may be one as we are one. So that's the first thing. It's a work in progress, isn't it?

We're not there yet. Notice what he says in verse 23. That they may be completely one. Verse 26. He says, Obviously heaven, what will heaven be like?

[17:29] Heaven will be a world of love. And it will be complete. And we're not there yet. And so this is a work in progress.

We've got to work in it because this is what Jesus wants for his church. It's not about denominational politics. It is about a real spiritual oneness.

A face-to-faceness. Using our different gifts to gather. A unity and diversity and a working relationship. Secondly, he wants us to be with him in heaven. United on earth, but with him in heaven.

Look at verse 24. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am. To see my glory that you've given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

It's the ultimate family gathering. Christmas is coming, isn't it? And families get together. And that's difficult for some people. But for many people, that's a great time.

[18:33] When the extended family gets together and there's all sorts of tensions and difficulties with people you haven't seen for ages. And yet, nevertheless, it's a joyous occasion when the family gets together.

And all sorts of preparations are made for that, aren't they? But that's nothing compared to what Jesus has in mind for us. Nothing compared to what Jesus has in mind.

The ultimate family gathering. When God's people from all over the globe, in every area of history. Imagine that. Imagine celebrating Christmas Day with Martin Luther.

It'd be raucous, wouldn't it? But when Christians from every period of history, from all around the globe, from every language group, from every cultural background, will gather together, that's what Jesus envisages here.

Remember in John 14, he says this, In my Father's house, there's plenty of room. In my Father's house, there's many dwelling places.

[19:36] There's many, there's much room. And if I would not have told you, I would have told you if it wasn't like that. And I'm going to prepare a place for you. And he's going to go out of that room, out of that city, to the cross to prepare a room for you.

That's what he means when he says, and I go to prepare a place for you. I'm going to the cross to prepare a place for you. I'm going into outer darkness, that you may be brought into the fellowship of God.

And if I'm going to do that, then he says, when I come, I will receive you to myself. That where I am, you may be also. That's the Christian's hope, isn't it?

David Cook is an Australian Presbyterian. He's a great preacher. He was a kind of moderator of the Presbyterian Church.

And he wrote a Christmas letter to all the Presbyterian churches a couple of years ago. And he said this. On the 3rd of January, as a member of the Sydney Cricket Ground, I will get up at 5 a.m.

[20:45] I will queue up at the members' gate at 6 a.m. And then I will run from the gate in what is called the Paddington Gift. To secure my seat for the day in the members' stand of the Sydney Cricket Ground.

I'll try to reserve the seat next to me for a friend. He'll get up at about 9.30 a.m., wandering to the ground at 10.30 a.m. For the start of play, securing the fact that I've reserved a seat for him.

I pay the member subscription. I get up at 5 a.m. I queue up at 6 a.m. And run for it at 7 a.m. I do all the work. He wanders in at 10.30 a.m. And enjoys the fruit of my labors.

David Cook says that's what makes Christianity unique. He says all religions tell you to get up early. To line up. To join the queue.

To run the race. To do your best. But you're never sure whether you've done enough. If you get a seat in heaven or paradise, well, it reflects well on you. But you might not.

[21 : 48] That is what religions say. But Jesus came into the world to live perfectly, die substitutionally, rise bodily. And he says, in my Father's house there are many seats.

And I've reserved one for you. That's the gospel, isn't it? Jesus wants you to be there. Jesus has reserved a seat for you.

Christmas Day, you sit around the table and someone says, where should I seat? And you say, well, there's a seat with your name on it here.

Think of Bob Cratchit in Dickens. Christmas Carol. His nose pressed against the window looking in at the Christmas celebrations on the outside. Remember that scene? And that's what eternity will look like for you unless you turn to the Lord Jesus.

Every single one of us wants to be on the inside. No one wants to be on the outside. That's human nature. People want to be in the inner circle, in the in crowd.

[22 : 57] And I'm telling you this morning, if you do not trust in Jesus, you will be on the outer forever. Out of darkness, on your own, with your face pressed against the window. Looking in on what might have been.

And if only you'd been wise enough to turn to Jesus when you had the chance. I'm going to the cross, he says, to repair a place for you. So that when I come again, I will receive you to myself. And you will be with me.

That's what makes heaven, heaven, isn't it? That we will be with Jesus. It's not golden pavements or fluffy clouds or even a renovated body.

A friend of mine was saying to an old lady once, he was trying to comfort her. She was dying and he said to her, you're going to be with Jesus. She said, I don't want to go and live with strangers.

And the truth is, isn't it? If Jesus is a stranger to you, you've got nothing to look forward to but out of darkness and loneliness. Cut off from everything that is good.

[24 : 09] And that's what hell is. God is good. He's the source of all goodness. And to be on the outside of that is unthinkable. And Jesus says, I don't want that for you. I don't want that for you.

I want you to believe the message of the apostles. I want you to come in. I want you to be where I am. In 1981, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was dying and healing.

He's kind of one of the great preachers of the 20th century. He was dying of cancer and he lived here in healing. And in the last few weeks of Dr. Lloyd-Jones' life, he couldn't speak.

But he wrote a note to his wife. And this is what the note said in shaky handwriting. Don't pray for healing. Don't keep me from the glory. Don't keep me from the glory.

Don't keep me from the glory. Don't keep me from the glory. That's what Jesus wants for his church. He wants you united on earth. He wants you with him in heaven. And then lastly, he wants the world to know.

[25 : 13] The world word is used different ways in John's gospel. This world is God's world. It is his creation.

We are a part of it. It is given to us to enjoy. It is God's world, so enjoy it. But the world is also Satan's kingdom. The Bible tells us that the devil is the prince of this world.

And so we ought to be careful of the kind of propaganda of the devil. And we don't get taken in by that. I've left them in the world, but protect them in the world.

This world is God's world, so enjoy it. This world is Satan's world, so beware of it. But God hasn't finished with this world.

And this world has turned its back on him and rebelled against him. But God hasn't finished with it. He doesn't just wash his hands. He wants this world to be one for Christ.

[26 : 13] That's why he's left his church. That's why he's left us here. So he wants us to reach out to this world. That they may know.

I pray for all those in the world who will believe in me. And so there are people on there in our family circle, amongst our friendship group, who will believe in Jesus.

They don't know that yet. And yet they will. I love the story of William Bramble Booth. He was the founder of the Salvation Army. And he was speaking at a huge evangelistic rally. And somebody said to him afterwards, there was a huge response to his message. People came rushing down to the front to be counseled. And someone said to him, wasn't it wonderful to see so many coming forward tonight?

And William Booth said, my eyes were on those who didn't come. Those who are yet to believe. I think that's the danger of a full church this morning, isn't it?

[27 : 26] It's the danger of thinking, well, aren't we doing great? Isn't this marvelous? We've got a full church. Not there are scores of people out there who are yet to believe.

Other sheep, Jesus says, I have, who are not of this fold. They too I must bring in. And they will be one flock with one shepherd.

So Jesus hasn't finished with this world yet. What does Jesus want the world to know? Two things. Look what it says. It says, so that the world might know that you have sent me.

That's what the world needs to know. That's what people don't understand. When I was growing up, there was a broadcaster called Clive James.

We weren't allowed to watch him, actually, in our house. But he's brilliant. He was a brilliant broadcaster and a brilliant writer. Some of his things I wouldn't advise. He was an atheist.

[28 : 25] And he wrote this just before he died. He says, the Christmas will come when our granddaughter will want to know just whose birthday Christmas is. And an important part of her upbringing will begin.

Her parents are both believers in the classic sense. But it may be that one day their daughter will become an unbeliever in the same way that I am. She might not believe that Jesus is still alive in heaven.

But there's one important thing that even I will be able to tell her. Which is that Jesus, the first great man to be a champion of women, believed in her. And that alone would be sufficient cause to bless every night and day of the season wherein his birth is celebrated.

It's so frustrating, isn't it? He was a brilliant intellect. So funny. So witty in his writing.

So intelligent. But he's entirely missed the point. And for all his wit and charm and all his massive intellect, he hadn't grasped the message of Christmas.

[29 : 32] And the message of Christmas is not what a wonderful person Jesus is. But that they may know that you have sent me. There's no other human being who can say that.

That they may know. And when you grasp that, you're beginning to understand the gospel. That this peasant Jesus from Nazareth isn't something that's popped up in an evolutionary cycle.

He's not some kind of aberration of human existence. But this is somebody who has come from outside. Who has been sent into the world as a rescuer and as a saviour.

And he goes to the cross. And so remember, there's no church to speak of at this point when Jesus is praying.

There are 11 men who are about to run away and hide and they will desert him. And his prayer, down through the centuries, his prayer is that this world might know that he was sent into this world by the Father.

[30 : 35] And now this morning, in 2022, there are more than 2 billion Christians in the world. And what brings people to Jesus Christ is that they suddenly begin to understand that the man they had written off is the man who's been sent into this world by the Father.

And the other thing we're told he prays for and he wants the world to know is that you have loved them as you loved me.

Think about that in verse 23. That's what they need to know. That you've sent me, but that you've loved them as you've loved me. And it takes us to the very heart of the gospel.

That you've loved them. What, me? How can God love me as much as he loves Jesus? That's what it says.

He wants me to know, he wants you to know that God loves me as much as he loves Jesus. He says, righteous Father, you love me since the world began.

[31 : 37] I want them to know, I want them to know that you love them as much as you love me. Think how much the Father loves the Son. In the councils of eternity before the world existed, the Father's heart goes out to his Son.

He delights in his Son. And the gospel tells me that God delights in me. And accepts me just as much as he accepted Jesus.

It's too good to be true, isn't it? Let me finish with a story. Colin Chapman tells a story in his book, *A Case for Christianity*.

He quotes Festo Kevin Gary, who is a Ugandan archbishop. It's an amazing story if you can read the book. It's a pretty gruesome account of a firing squad, execution of three men in 1973.

Let me just read it to you. February the 10th began as a sad day for us in Kabbali people. We were commanded to come to the stadium and witness the execution.

[32 : 47] This is in the days of EDR, just after. People were commanded to come to the stadium and witness the execution. Death permeated the atmosphere. A silent crowd of about 3,000 were there to watch.

I had permission from the authorities to speak to the men before they died. Two of my fellow ministers were with me. They brought the men in a truck and unloaded them. They were handcuffed and their feet were chained. The firing squad stood to attention.

And as we walked into the center of the stadium, I was wondering what to say. How do you give the gospel to doomed men who are probably seething with rage? We approached them from behind.

And as they turned to look at us, what a sight.

Their faces were all alight with an unmistakable glow and radiance. Before we could say anything, they said, Bishop, thank you for coming. I wanted to tell you that the day I was arrested in my prison cell, I asked the Lord Jesus to come into my heart.

He came in and forgave me all my sin. Heaven is now open and there's nothing between me and my God. Please tell my wife and children that I'm going to be with Jesus. Ask them to accept him into their lives as I did.

[33 : 48] The other two men told similar stories. Excitingly raising their hands, which rattled their handcuffs. I felt what I needed to do was talk to the soldiers, not to the condemned. So I translated what the men had said into a language the soldiers understood.

The military men were standing there with guns cocked and bewilderment on their faces. They were so dumbfounded that they forgot to put hoods over the men's faces. The three faced the firing squad standing close together.

They looked towards the people and started to wave handcuffs and all. The people waved back.

Then shots were fired and the three were with Jesus. We stood in front of them, our hearts throbbing with joy, mingled with tears.

It was a day never to be forgotten. Though dead, the men spoke so loudly. To all of Kegesi district and beyond. So that there was an upsurge of life in Christ, which challenges death and defeats it.

The next Sunday I was preaching to a huge crowd in the hometown of one of the executed men.

Again, the feel of death was over the congregation. But when I gave them the testimony of their man and how he died, there erupted a great song of praise to Jesus.

[34 : 58] And many turned to the Lord there. There is Jesus' prayer being answered, isn't it? And Jesus says, I pray for all who will believe in me through the message of the apostles.

I pray that they may know that you sent me. And that you love them as you have loved me. And I will continue to pray.

It's wonderful, isn't it? Our great high priest this morning, he prays this prayer. And there is no way that it will not be answered. And so I think I'm probably temperamentally an optimist.

But I am theologically an optimist. I am a gospel optimist. Because there is no way that the fervent, effectual prayer of this righteous man will not be answered.

Listen. Let's pray. Let's pray.