

Prayer for the Future Disciples – A Prayer For Infinite Delight

²⁰ “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹ that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²² And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: ²³ I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

²⁴ “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵ O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. ²⁶ And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare *it*, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17:20–26)

Perhaps you've been asked the question, or asked and answered it yourself, “If you could have anything in the world, what would it be? If money were no object, what would you ask for? What thing, place, experience, event, relationship?” In fact, a more revealing, and more interesting way of asking the question is, “if you could get something for the person you love the most, what would that be? What would you wish for the one you love the most?” The way you answer that question reveals what you think is the very pinnacle of happiness. It's what you think is the highest and best form of existence, the most blessed state. Because for the person you love the most, you would want nothing less than the very best.

The Lord Jesus wants nothing less than the very best for His people. But what is that very best? If you believe the prosperity Gospel teachers, they will tell you that the very best is a life of wealth, health, and material goods. If you believe the self-esteem teachers, they will tell you the very best is to feel fulfilled, mindful, significant, happy with yourself, forgiving and loving yourself. But a prosperity Gospel Christianity and a self-esteem Christianity have hijacked verses from the Bible to teach something Jesus never taught. What Jesus wants for His people is far, far better than health, wealth, and self-esteem.

He names and describes what the best gift could be in this great prayer of John 17. Here Jesus prays His ultimate desires for Himself and for His people. We've already seen how He began with a prayer for Himself, a prayer for glory which would take place through Him being the sovereign saviour giving eternal life to those who believe. We then saw his prayer for the disciples, that the Father would preserve their faith and keep them through this world, because if they lose their faith, they lose everything. But in fact, all that leads to the great and final goal, which is what Jesus prays for in verses 20 to 26. Here the prayer for His own glory and the prayer for the perseverance of believers meet together in a grand climax, a huge symphonic crescendo of Jesus praying for the ultimate blessing upon His people.

When the history of the human race is written, it will show that God wanted to give people the best, and they refused it in favour of the inferior. We have Scriptures like

¹⁰ I *am* the LORD your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

¹¹ “But My people would not heed My voice, And Israel would *have* none of Me... ¹²⁻¹³ “Oh, that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways! ... ¹⁶ He would have fed them also with the finest of wheat; And with honey from the rock I would have satisfied you.” (Psalm 81:10–16)

The nature of sin is refusing to believe God has a better plan for us than sin promises or that Satan proposes. When we sin, we choose the lesser pleasure, the smaller joy, the narrower happiness. It is what C. S. Lewis said, “It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot

imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

So here we have what Jesus knows is the very best thing for us, the best gift God can give. These last verses of John 17 tie together with how the prayer began, requesting the ultimate thing for the people Jesus loves to the uttermost.

This prayer is like peeling back the layers of an onion. One request leads to a deeper layer, which leads to an even deeper layer. When we get to the third layer of Jesus' request, we find the greatest and best thing He could give us.

Let's begin with the outside. Jesus prays for

I. A Witness From Their Unity

²⁰ “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹ that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²² And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: ²³ I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

Jesus prays not only for His current disciples, but for the future ones, which includes us. We have believed the words written by the original disciples in the New Testament. The request, given four times (twice in verse 21, and again in verse 22 and verse 23), is that they may be one. We saw last week, this is a spiritual union, a union of true, invisible oneness, not of outward organisational unity.

But then, twice Jesus gives the purpose of this unity:

v21 that the world may believe that You sent Me

v23 and that the world may know that You have sent Me

The world does not know God. Jesus says so in verse 25. ²⁵ O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me.

Jesus knows the Father intrinsically; the disciples have come to know God by believing in the Sent One, Jesus, but the world still does not know. Jesus says that when believers are one, in the particular way Jesus means them to be one, the world will have a witness that Christianity is real, that Jesus is truly the Son of God.

How is that so?

Because the unity that the Gospel brings is as miraculous as the Gospel. It not only reconciles us with God and gives us a new heart for God, it reconciles us with others and gives us a new heart towards them. It does something which cannot be explained in earthly terms.

Jesus gave His people the message of the glory of God, as he puts it in verse 22, or to put it another way, He declared the name in verse 26. These disciples received it, and they have already begun to be one – a tax collector named Matthew and a Zealot named Simon, an impulsive fisherman named Simon, and a doubting Thomas, rough sons of thunder James and John with pious Philip and Andrew who'd been with John the Baptist. But it was going to go way beyond that. After Jesus rose and ascended, and the Day of Pentecost came, the disciples thought the kingdom would now come in Israel as revival seemed to break out in Jerusalem. Instead, Peter is sent to the coastal town of Caesarea, where he meets a Roman named Cornelius, who is a follower of the Jewish faith, but has

not fully converted and become a Jew. As Peter preaches, the Spirit of God falls on the Gentiles there just as it had in Jerusalem in Pentecost. The unmistakable meaning is that Gentiles are part of Messiah's body, just as they are. They don't need to become Jews to partake of the Jewish Messiah. These former enemies who couldn't eat at the same table, would now celebrate the Lord's Supper in shared local churches. They would be one.

And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock *and* one shepherd. (John 10:16)

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

According to Scripture, when we are truly born again, we are joined to Christ, and thereby joined to all those who are joined to Christ.

But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*. (1 Corinthians 6:17)

so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. (Romans 12:5)

This is not something the world can engineer. This is the bringing together of people who have no outward, worldly reason to be together, but who now consider each other to be family. This is a miracle. The world tries to create unity through negotiations and reparations and laws against discrimination or segregation, but it cannot achieve what the Gospel achieves.

Jesus was not referring to an external uniformity but to the visible manifestation of our spiritual unity. "Christian harmony is not based on the externals of the flesh but the internals and eternal of the Spirit in the inner person."-- Warren Wiersbe

Our church contains people who would, in a worldly sense, never sit together. Zulus and Afrikaners fought wars in the 19th century, but we have Zulus and Afrikaners embracing each other in this congregation. The English and the Afrikaner fought two Boer Wars in this country, but English and Afrikaner love each other sincerely in this church. During the Mfecane of the 19th century, there was conflict between the Zulu and the Sotho, Ndebele and Swazi people, but all these are here in our church, serving one another. Apartheid separated us into white, Indian, coloured and black and ranked us accordingly, but all of these so-called races are here in this church, and there is no hierarchy, no pecking order, but we honour and pray for one another. Right now Moslems and Jews are fighting a war in Gaza. We have in our church those formerly from Judaism and Islam, children of Isaac, and children of Ishmael taking communion together.

The world cannot achieve this. But it is ours through the same Gospel that reconciled us to God. And one of the reasons to invite your unbelieving friends to church, and to get-togethers with other believers in this church, is that they may see a unity that is a miracle. This is what Jesus said earlier in the Upper Room Discourse: "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35)

But this is just the top layer of Jesus request. It is a marvellous thing to have and experience this unity. But that is still not the end goal, or the best part. The next and deeper layer that Jesus prays for is what this unity reveals, what it teaches. Jesus is praying that our witness give us something else. That thing is

II. A Window Into the Trinity

²¹ that they all may be one, **as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us**, that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²² And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one **just as We are one**: ²³ **I in them, and You in Me**; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

Jesus says the oneness is not just love between believers, but it is actually something much deeper. He says believers are one *in the same way* that the Father and Son have a oneness. He says it again in verse 22 :one just as We are one". And then He expands what the oneness in the Trinity is.

The Father and the Son mutually indwell each other. This is the comparison to understand this oneness. Within God, there is an intertwining, immersion, a coinherence of the three. They are distinct persons with complete union with the others. The kind of unity believers experience gives us insight into the inner life of God.

In fact, Paul employs the same connection between the Trinity at least two occasions when explaining the unity we have in Christ.

⁴ There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. ⁶ And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. (1 Corinthians 12:4–6)

⁴ *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all. (Ephesians 4:4–6)

Our unity is a window into the Trinity. Thomas Aquinas: "In the Trinity, the mystery of God's innermost life is revealed." We are not yet at our destination, but we are certainly on holy ground. To speak of the inner life of the Godhead is to speak of that holy of holies where seraphim cover their eyes and their feet. To speak of the Trinity is not some kind of weird theological mathematics where 1+1+1=1. It is not merely about taking all the possible analogies in the world which partially illustrate how three things can be one. Tertullian: "The mystery of the Trinity ... is to be devoutly revered, not irreverently dissected." Analogies and three-in-ones are all very interesting, but that is not what a Christian worshipper is seeking as he reverently peers into the mystery of the Trinity.

What we have here is what God is like in His deepest being. And in our many weeks of studying the Upper Room Discourse, we have been in the richest, densest teaching on the Trinity in all of Scripture. Yes, all the New Testament writers assume it, they often employ trinitarian blessings as they open and close their letters, or they reference the Persons of the Trinity as God. But nowhere else do we have the direct teaching on the Trinity that we have had in these chapters. Here we learnt that that Son perfectly reveals the Father, that there is complete unity and equality between the persons, and yet distinctiveness. We were introduced to the Comforter, the Advocate or Holy Spirit, and found out that He will indwell believers, and testify and glorify Christ, using the indwelling Word of God. As Athanasius put it: "It is only by the Trinity that we know the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit."

So why should we want to be let into this inner chamber, and understand the nature of God?

"The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God who he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in the contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity.. No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God...But while the subject humbles the mind, it also

expands it. He who often thinks of God, will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe.... The most excellent study for expanding the soul, is the science of Christ, and of Him crucified, and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity."

So it is as if the unity we have in the Gospel is actually the best analogy we have for understanding the very inner life of God. As we dwell together, with all our diversity and distinctiveness, and yet experience this bond of affection and fellowship, we are beginning to experience what it means for the Persons of God to indwell one another. Michael Reeves: "The Trinity is the governing centre of all Christian faith and practice, for by knowing the Father, Son, and Spirit, we enter into the very life of God."

But this window into the Trinity is not the final and best gift that God has for His children. We are two layers in, but the best is yet to come. This window into the Trinity is not the stuff of spectators, but the experience of participants. This window into the Trinity will place us, squarely

III. Within the Love of the Trinity

²³ I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, **and have loved them as You have loved Me.**

²⁶ And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare *it*, **that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.**"

Here is the greatest of the gifts. Jesus prays that when we have this witness through our unity, it will be a window into the Trinity, and in there, we will know the love the Father has for the Son is also the love He has for us.

At the very heart of God's inner life is love, the love of Father, Son, and Spirit. Indeed, if God is a single unity, as believed in Islam, Judaism, Unitarianism, and many of the cults, then how could He have been love in eternity past? John tells us, "God is Love", but if God were only one person, who was there to love in eternity? But in a trinity of Persons, there was joyful communion forever, which overflowed into creation.

C. S. Lewis: "The doctrine of the Trinity tells us that God is love, and love exists within His very being from all eternity."

According to this prayer, to be caught up into Christian love in the church is to be caught up into the very love of God for God. It is to experience the delight of God the Father in God the Son, and God the Son in God the Father. And some theologians have suggested that the very delight of Father and Son in each other is actually a third Person, the Spirit, not merely love as an impersonal action, but Love Himself, the Spirit of God: the personified love of God for God. And since it is this third Person who comes to dwell within us, the Christian can be in the very middle of this love of God for God, which now includes us, because we are found in Christ, and children of the Father.

In fact, in Paul's famous prayer of Ephesians 3, this is the Mount Everest of the Christian experience. There is a chain here, linked by three occurrences of the word *that*, which leads to the ultimate experience: "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height—¹⁹to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

I suppose we both know this and forget this. We know that the highest experience of life is love. We all seek to be loved and to love. We wish it in family. We seek it in marriage, and friendship. We agree with Paul that “if we have *the gift of prophecy*, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though we have all faith, so that we could remove mountains, but have not love, we are nothing.³ And though we bestow all our goods to feed *the poor*, and though we give our bodies to be burned, but have not love, it profits us nothing.”

Richard Baxter said, “Is it a small thing in your eyes to be loved by God—to be the son, the spouse, the love, the delight of the King of Glory? Christian, believe this and think about it. You will be eternally embraced in the arms of the love which was from everlasting and will extend to everlasting. Of His own love He gave you being, of His own love He gave you His Son, and of His own love He will give you a crown of glory.”

And now we have the beginning and the end of this prayer tied together in verse 24. The glory of God which is the great purpose of life, and this love which thrills and fills our hearts are united in what Jesus asks for in verse 24.

²⁴ “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

Jesus longs for the day when we, the bride of Christ, will look upon His face, the glorious King, and see His incomparable beauty. And in that moment, the love which we now have by faith, will be a love by sight. What we know now by the Spirit illuminating our heart, will on that day be seen by our resurrected and glorified eyes. It will be this gift of loving the Son and loving the Father, and being loved by the Father, and being loved by the Son, now taken to one degree of glory to another, one level of fulness of joy, to another level of fullness of joy.

In Christian theology and history, there is a long history of the doctrine known as the beautiful vision. The beautiful vision is the idea of the bliss we will have when we see God in Heaven, love Him fully, and experience His love. It is the state of highest bliss, from which we won't want or need anything else.

And the good news is that Jesus prays that this experience of His glory begins now.¹⁸ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

John Owen: "To behold the glory of Christ is the greatest privilege which this life affords. This is the dawning of heaven. He that longs to behold the glory of Christ in heaven, who is so much in love with the glory of Christ that he cannot be satisfied without beholding it continually, is blessed and holy."

Most of us remember the stories of the magic lamp, and the genie or creature who would grant your three wishes. Those tales always illustrate how wrong desires, when obtained, destroy us. The difference here is this is no fable, and Jesus does not just get three wishes. What Jesus asks from the Father, He gets. And what has He asked for us, as One who knows what is absolutely best for us? He has asked for us not riches, and health, and power, and fame, and achievement, and legacy. He has gone to the very centre of Heaven's treasury, and asked for the most precious stone: that we would know the love of God now in the present, and one day perfectly in Heaven.