

Grace, mercy and peace are yours in abundance through faith in Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:²³ I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

²⁴ “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

²⁵ “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me.²⁶ I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

This is the Gospel of our Lord.

Dear Friends,

“I’ll pray for you.” Those are comforting words, aren’t they? We take it as a sign of love when someone offers to take the time to pray for us. When a friend, or a relative, or a brother or sister in Christ says, “I’ll pray for you,” we are always thankful for their thoughtfulness.

Although our prayers for each other are motivated by love, the Scriptures also command us to pray for each other. In his 1st letter to Timothy the Apostle Paul urges that, **“requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone.”** (1 Timothy 2:1).

“I’ll pray for you.” How would you feel if Jesus said that to you? I don’t know if I could even express my emotions knowing that my Savior was praying for me! And of course, just knowing who he is and what he can do, would add to my appreciation of his offer to pray for me.

The idea of Jesus praying for us is more than just wishful thinking. The Bible tells us that Jesus does pray for us. Since he has risen from the dead and has ascended into heaven, he takes what we express in prayer (our needs, our hopes, and our fears) to his Father on our behalf.

But Jesus does more than just act like a transmitter for our prayers. He has specific things that he too wants to see happen in our lives. And so, he also prays for us in addition to bringing our prayers to God the Father. Of course, the whole idea of Jesus praying for us when he is true God and one with the Father and the Holy Spirit boggles our minds. How can God pray to God? But may the truth still be a comfort to us. With childlike faith may we accept the awesome truth that our Savior prays for us.

As we consider this portion of scripture from John’s Gospel, our theme will be, **“Christ Prays for His Church of Believers.”** He does this so, **“That it may be a united church,”** and **“That it may be a glorious church.”**

I. In the first part of chapter 17 Jesus was praying specifically for his disciples. Now in verse 20 he tells us, **“My prayer is not for them alone.”** Jesus expands his prayer to include all believers

who are part of the New Testament church. Listen closely to his words: **“I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,”** Jesus is talking about the future. About those who will believe in the future. Why? Because of their message.

Whose message is Jesus talking about? The message his disciples would preach in the very near future. Jesus prayed this prayer on Maundy Thursday, just before he and his disciples left to go out to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus knew what was coming – his suffering, his death, his resurrection. He had told his disciples on three different occasions what was going to happen, but at this point they did not realize what the message was going to be that they would proclaim. The disciples would not know that message until Pentecost – 50 days after Easter. On Pentecost the Holy Spirit would open their eyes and give them an understanding of all that had taken place.

That message is the message that Jesus is talking about here. The message that he has paid for our sins and all who believe in him as their Savior will have eternal life. The Holy Spirit will work through the message of the disciples to bring people to faith.

Even though all the disciples died thousands of years ago, their message still continues to bring people to faith because the Holy Spirit inspired them to record their message in the Bible. Jesus prayer is then that all believers are one with him and the Father. He is praying for the invisible church which includes only believers – those united to him by faith.

The union between Jesus and God the Father is a perfect union. It is also a union that goes beyond our human understanding. But we know it is there because our Savior tells us it is there and so we believe it by faith.

It is our faith in Jesus that establishes a union between us and God. Our union, however is imperfect because of sin, but this very union brings us forgiveness for our sins. Some churches take the words of Jesus here to mean that all churches should unite into one large visible church. Some churches have come together but usually with the premise that they agree to disagree in some areas. They fool themselves into thinking they have unity but it is not unity centered on God's Word

Jesus prayer here is that we be one in every aspect of the Word. That is the only way the Word works – when it is preached in its truth and purity. When all of it is accepted as God's Word and not just the parts we like. God wants us to be unified in the Word so the world may know why the Father sent the Son. So the message of salvation can go out into the world.

This message of salvation which unifies us through faith also brings us other benefits. Jesus prays so that we might have a glorious church. He divides that into two parts: the glory we have here on this earth and the glory we look forward to in heaven.

II. The glory on this earth is the glory of Christ's victory won for us on the cross. That brings us the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. His suffering and death show us the depth of his love for us. We are unified through the cross of suffering and glorified because of his resurrection.

We won't realize the full effect of Christ's glory until we die and go to heaven. Then we will see Christ's full glory and we ourselves will be glorified, sharing in that perfect glory of Christ. As Jesus prays for us, he doesn't make this as a request but says this is my will for all those who believe. This is going to happen. We can count on it.

We can count on it because the Father is Righteous. That is how Jesus addresses him in verse 25, **“Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”** **God is righteous and he has made us righteous through His Son. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”** (John 3:16-17) . God wants us be one in faith and to share in his glory.

We do that through the message of the Apostles – by staying close to God through his Word. The more we live and dwell in the Word, the more Christ lives in us and unifies us with the body of all believers. God wants us to have that unity and so he says, “I'll pray for you.”

May his words and prayers bring comfort to and move us to strive for the unity of faith and to look forward to sharing in his glory when our faith in our Savior takes us home to heaven. Amen.