

That You May Believe in Prayer

John 17

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, October 28, 2018

I want to begin our sermon time by inviting you to turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of John. So, if you would turn with me to the Gospel of John, that's our book we're in this morning. And while you're turning there, I want to ask you a question to get us started, how often do you pray? It's a convicting question, isn't it? How often do you pray? I've told you before, if you want to make a Christian feel real guilty, ask them how often they pray and evangelize. We all feel guilty in those areas. We all fall short in that. But how would you answer that question? If we put a stopwatch by your bed or your prayer closet and timed it, what would it say? In 2016, the National Post did a report on this, in which they said that only 20% of Canadians pray on a daily basis of what they polled, 20%. While the rest of us either don't pray at all or just a few times a week. But what about you? How often would you say you pray?

John Bunyan said, "He who runs from God in the morning will scarcely find Him the rest of the day." I think he's right. We often do that. We run from God in the morning. He also said, "The truths I know best, I learned on my knees." I think we would agree with that as well. You don't really know God's Word until you take it to your knees in prayer. A farmer once stopped at a city restaurant to eat lunch. And when he was served food, he bowed his head to pray. And one of the customers shouted in front of the whole restaurant, he said, "Hey, pops where you're from, does everyone give thanks before they eat?" And the farmer said, "No, the hogs don't." So, the only thing that doesn't pray is a hog. The only thing that doesn't pray is an animal. People should pray. We should bring our requests to God.

There's lots of reasons for this. I mean, just think of a couple of things you can't do without prayer. You can't save anybody without praying, amen.? Anybody ever saved anybody or anybody come to Christ without prayer? You can't do it. You can't even become a Christian. You can't be born again without calling out to God. You can't grow as a Christian without it either. We're going to talk about sanctification here in a minute, but you can't grow in Christ, you can't be sanctified and defeat sin without prayer. Some of you know what this is like. You wrestle with the same sin for years and years and years until finally it clicks, "Hey, I should pray for this." And you pray for it, and the Lord gives you victory. Just as importantly, you can't change without prayer. Prayer is essential to the Christian life.

That brings us to John chapter 17. Before we get there, actually, nowhere was this seen more clearly than in the life of Jesus Christ. Nobody prayed like Jesus. I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but Jesus, when you read the Gospels, you see He spent whole nights in prayer. And at one time, He spent a whole month in it. Do you remember that? When He was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights, He prayed that whole time. In some of the accounts of the Gospels, the first thing He did was pray and the last thing He did was pray. When He died, He said, "Father, into Your hands, I commit My spirit." That was a prayer, one of the most solemn prayers in history given by the Lord Jesus Christ. Just before He did that, He was so immersed in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, He was so intense in prayer that He sweat drops of blood. I don't know about you, but I have never sweat drops of blood doing anything, let

alone praying. And Jesus did that because He was a Man of prayer. Prayer was a central focus of His life. It meant everything to Him, and nowhere was His prayer so vivid as what we read in John 17.

So, our passage for this morning is John 17. This is the longest recorded prayer from Jesus in the Bible. In fact, to my knowledge, it's the longest recorded prayer in the New Testament. You see longer prayers in the Psalms and places like that, but this is the longest one in the New Testament. It's 26 verses long. The whole chapter is one big prayer. Most of the time, when we read about Jesus praying, it's just a sentence or two. This is a whole section.

Just to set the stage for this, if you're joining us for the first time this morning, we're in the middle of a series called the "That You May Believe" series. Because John says he wrote this book so that you may believe. In John 20:31, he says, "But these have been written (these stories have been written) so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you may have life in His name." Each of the Gospels had a purpose. They all had a reason why they were written. And John says, "This Gospel was written so that you may believe, so you would trust in Jesus Christ."

And John says this a lot of different ways in the book. Just a few examples of this, in John 3:36, he says, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not believe the Son will not see life, for the wrath of God abides on him." That's one way you see belief in the Gospel of John. If you believe in Jesus, you have life. If you don't, you don't. The wrath of God abides on you. That means it sticks to you like glue. In John 7:37 and 38, he says it another way. He says, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. For he who believes in Me, as the Scripture says, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" That's a way of saying, if you trust in Christ, your soul will never be dry again. He will give you all the satisfaction you need. In John 11, He says, "I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" That's the Gospel of John in a nutshell. That's what John wants to know. Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

By the time we come to John 17, this has become a prayer on the lips of Jesus. He's gone from talking about belief, talking about faith, to praying for it in the life of His disciples. This is the last night of Jesus' life. This is His final hours before the cross. It occurs in what's been called the Upper Room. It was a large room in an anonymous house in Jerusalem. We don't really know where it was, but that's where the conversation starts. Then if you look in chapter 14:31, you see the conversation kind of change scenes here. In John 14:31, the very last sentence there, Jesus says, "Get up and let us go from here." That implies that they left the Upper Room as He said this. They went out into the night. So, in chapters 13 through 14, they're inside having a meal, enjoying the peace and quiet of this room. And then in chapters 15 through 17, they go out into the streets of Jerusalem toward the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus will be betrayed by Judas.

While they're walking, Jesus talks to them about several things, and one of them is His death. He says, "I'm going away. I'm going to die," but He tells the disciples, "Don't worry about that. Don't let your hearts be troubled..." (Quentin just referred to that a moment ago) "...Because the Holy Spirit will be with you. He will comfort you and guide you." And then He says to "abide in Me." That's another command He gives them here. He says, "You'll be persecuted and thrown

out of the synagogue and you'll be killed like Me, but you'll be saved if you abide in Me.” Then He says in chapter 16, if you want to look in verses 32 through 33. He says, “32 Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. 33 These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” Then chapter 17:1, “Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said (or He prayed for them) ...” That's how Jesus ends this amazing portion of Scripture. That's how He wraps this up, with a prayer.

I just have to say, these are some deep waters here. This is some really heavy stuff we're going to talk about this morning. One commentator said, “It was the greatest sermon followed by the greatest prayer in human history.” Another Puritan said, he wouldn't touch it for fear of messing it up. He said, “I'm not going to preach on this.” And I can relate to that. After the sermon last week, some of my care group members told me they had ... I didn't answer all their questions in John 16. And I said, “Well, I didn't answer all my questions in John 16.” This is some deep stuff here. On the way home, my wife was asking, “What about this and what about that?” This makes you ask those questions. You walk away not understanding all of this. Because let me tell you, this is what John 17 is. This is God talking to God here. This is the Trinity talking to itself. You'll never get to the bottom of that. You'll never understand it.

To say this another way, this is a glimpse into heaven. When you get to heaven, this is what you'll see. You'll see God talking to God. In eternity, Jesus will be talking to the Father, and that's what you read here. In fact, Romans 8:34 says, Jesus is at the right hand of God right now, making intercession for us. That means He is praying at this moment on our behalf. What you see here in John 17 is what Jesus is doing now in eternity. Hebrews 7:25 says, “He always lives to make intercession for us.” In other words, this is a passion of His life, to pray for us. First John 2:1 says, “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” And this is what you see here. This is the Advocacy Ministry of Jesus Christ. And you'll never get to the bottom of that. One author said this was a thunderbolt from the sky and a piece of lightning from the gates of heaven itself. Another called it the “Holy of Holies of Scripture”.

One interesting thought I read or heard this week on this is, this has been called the official Lord's prayer. We often call Matthew 6 the Lord's Prayer. Remember that? “Our Father, which art in heaven...?” But that says, “And forgive us our sins.” And if you think about it, Jesus couldn't pray that. Our Lord could not pray, “Forgive us our sins,” because He had never sinned. That's our prayer. That's the disciples' prayer in Matthew 6. This is what we could the Lord's Prayer. And it's the Lord's prayer right before He died. It's the Lord's prayer right before He goes to the cross.

In His weakness, He prayed. In His frailty, He came to the Father. We often forget Jesus was fully God and fully man. In every sense of the word, He was a man. Which means he had moments of weakness. Not moments of sin, but moments of weakness, and this is one of them. And in His moment of weakness, He does the one thing we should all do in ours, and that is He prays.

Listen, if Jesus could pray in His weakness, how much more should we pray in ours, amen? I mean, if He would pray in His humanity, in His trials, how much more should we do the same? He was about to bear the sins of the world. He was about to experience more pain and death and misery than any other person before or since. He was about to experience more loneliness, more rejection, more hatred, more animosity, more wrath. And He does what all of us should do in a time like this - He prays.

Let's talk about that this morning. Let's look into the Lord's prayer in John 17. If you're taking notes, we're going to see three things Jesus prayed for on the night before He died. That's our outline for today. It's very simple. Three things Jesus prayed for the night before He died. Three prayer requests that God makes to God, the Son brings to the Father.

The first one is this, Jesus prays for Himself. That's the first prayer request we see here. That's how it starts. Jesus makes a prayer request for Himself. Not in a selfish way, "Lord, please give me a car," or something like that. In a selfless way, He prays for something greater. I want to read all of this to you so you can get the flow of it. If you look in verse 1, we're going to read all the way to verse 5. It says,

1 Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, 2 even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. 3 This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. 4 I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. 5 Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."

Now, obviously, there's a lot in here and there's a lot to talk about. We can't get to everything, but as you read this, there's a common theme that pops up over and over again, and it's the theme of what? What's the word that's repeated here over and over again? It's the word "glory". You see that? Several times in verse 1, and then down in verses 4 and 5. This is what He prays for, "Glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You." It's mentioned five times in this passage. This is a prayer request for glory.

He gives several reasons for the glory. Verse 2, God gave Him authority over all flesh, that He may give eternal life. He said, "This is eternal life (in verse 3) that they may know You and Your Son, whom You have sent." Those are reasons for the glory, but the whole prayer is a prayer for that topic. And the word "glory" in Greek is *doxazo* from which we get the word "doxology". It means, "to give glory, honour and praise to something" or we could say "shine a spotlight on it". When you shine a spotlight on something, you draw attention to it. You make it known. And that's what Jesus is praying for here, for the name of God to be known through Him. Which is appropriate, because that was what the cross was intended to do.

According to Ephesians 1:2, the cross would lead to the praise of His glory. And Hebrews 2:9 says, "The cross would crown Him with glory and honor." Death by crucifixion was a very inglorious thing in the first century. There's nothing glorious about watching someone die on a

cross. But in an ironic twist, God would take that inglorious event and crown Jesus with glory. He would put a crown of glory on His head for it.

Which leads to another point, and that's this, not only would the cross glorify God, but if you notice, it'll glorify Jesus as well. That's part of this prayer. There's an exchange taking place here. Verse 1 says, "Glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You." That's an exchange, two-sided. "Glorify Me, so that I can give it back to you. Shine the spotlight on me," Jesus says, "So I can shine it back on you." Just like a mirror takes the light and reflects it back, so Jesus takes the glory of God and reflects it back to the Father. Then if you look in verses 4 through 5, you see the flip side of this. It says, "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given me to do. Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." That's the exchange again. Now, God the Father is the mirror. Now, the Father takes the glory and He gives it back to the Son.

That last phrase explains a lot. When Jesus says, "The glory which I had with You before the world was," the idea is that Jesus was with God in heaven. He was with the Father in eternity past, receiving praise, receiving glory, and now He's asking to go back to that. "Father, take Me back to the place where I began." Which means, this was not sinful, because He deserved this. This was His to begin with, and it wasn't selfish because He was sharing it with the Father. Here's the mystery of this passage (thanks for hanging with me, this is deep stuff), here's the thunder bolt from heaven here, you can't pray like this, can you? I mean, a man or a woman or a child or an angel can't pray like this. You can't say, "Lord, glorify me with the glory which I had before the world was." You didn't have any glory before the world was. Maybe to say that another way, you weren't begotten, you were born, right? Jesus was begotten. He could pray this way because He was God. And he could ask for this glory because He deserved it. It was His by right.

Let me tell you how this applies to your life, what this means for us today. This means if you want to pray like Jesus did, you need to pray for His glory too. That should be a focus of your prayer. That should be the main idea. You need to pray for His glory too. Don't just pray for a new car or a new boat to go fishing in, pray for Jesus to be glorified in your life, for the spotlight to shine on Him. You can ask for your request, ask for the things you need, confess your sins, all those good things, but shine the spotlight back to Him.

I mentioned to you earlier how a few people pray today, but I didn't mention what they prayed for. According to that National Post report, the majority of people who pray ask for things like guidance and relief. They prayed for wisdom and help. They offered prayers of thanksgiving, which are all good things. Those are all good things to pray for. But in that report, nobody prayed for God's glory. It wasn't mentioned anywhere. Nobody prayed for God to be exalted in their life. You have to do that, if you want to pray like Jesus did.

If you noticed, we put a handout on your bulletins called "A Call to Prayer". Everybody get one of these? Looks like this here. Take that home and you can use it in your prayer life. These are the notes from one of Carl Hargrove's sermons at Family Camp a couple of years ago. But one of the points talks about this, point number seven on the first page there is on reverence. That's

from the Old Testament, and it says, “We need a reverent heart before we go before this awesome God. In Exodus 33, Moses is before God, and he asks of God, ‘Let me see Your glory.’ When we go to prayer, we should be thinking about the awesomeness of God, that we can even engage this God.” That’s what Jesus is doing here.

Let me flesh this out a little more and get even more practical, so you can see what I’m talking about. Here’s some practical illustrations of this. If you’re single, you often pray to be married, don’t you? You pray for a husband or a wife. Which is a good thing to do. I prayed that way when I was single. I remember in seminary as a single guy, going to church, watching all the families go around with kids and saying, “Lord, I want that ... Not that family, because those kids were kind of nasty, but that one over there ... that looks pretty good. I can do that. When Lord, when?” Right? You know a better way to pray? You know a better thing to ask for? You should pray for God’s glory. And here’s what I mean by that. Pray for Him to make you into someone who is marriable for His glory. He’ll do that. He’ll answer that. Pray for Him to make you into someone who would be a godly husband or wife, for His glory. Don’t pray, “Lord, change my circumstances.” Pray, “Lord, change me. Do a work of grace in me.”

If you’re married and you don’t have kids, pray the same way. Or you want more children. Pray, “God, I would like more kids, if it be Your will, but just as importantly, make me into a godly parent. Make me into a man of God or a woman of God who will give You glory.” If you’re out of work, pray to be a better employee, a godlier employee. If you’re lonely, pray to be a better friend to others. But focus your prayers on that. Build them on the glory of God, not on yourself.

A little boy once lost his marbles, literally. (Just think about this on your way home.) Anyway, a little boy once lost his marbles. And his mother walked into his bedroom as he was praying for them. And the next day, she said to him, “Son, did you find your marbles?” And he said, “No, I didn’t, but God told me there are bigger things to worry about.” And he’s right. There are bigger things to worry about than marbles or our own agenda.

Let me say it this way, if your prayer life is dry, if it’s weak and boring, if you feel like you’re praying for the same things over and over and over again and nothing gets answered, you need to ask yourself, “Am I doing this? Am I praying for God’s glory? Do I ever shine the spotlight on Him? Do I ever focus my attention on Him?” That’s what Jesus does here. That’s how He starts. In an interesting display, Jesus shines the glory on God the Father and God the Son. I mean, He is God the Son. It’s what makes it kind of mysterious in the passage. But this is all about God.

That leads to a second thing Jesus prays for here the night before He dies. And that is He prays for His disciples. Jesus prays for Himself, He prays, “Glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You.” And then He prays for His disciples, for the men who were there with Him before the cross. And the prayer comes in three parts.

The first one is this, He prays for their preservation. He prays for their preservation. Earlier, He said, “A slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you.” And in light of that, now, He says, He prays for them to be preserved through that. And I want to warn you, this is kind of long and hard to read, but hang in there with me because the request is

at the end. All of this is kind of preliminary to this last request. But if you look in verse 6, I'm going to read through verse 11. The request is in verse 11. But verse 6 says,

6 I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. 7 Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; 8 for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that you sent Me. 9 I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours; 10 and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11 I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father (and here's the request), keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are.

That's the prayer request there in verse 11. "Keep them in Your name."

It's fascinating to me that Jesus is about to go to the cross and He's praying for them, right? You guys ever been through a trial or if you've ever seen a trial coming, something really difficult coming in your life, what do you pray for? You pray for yourself the whole time, right? He's praying for the disciples here. As a matter of fact, He spends more time praying for them than He spends praying for Himself. And He asked that they would be kept. The word to "keep" there means "to watch" or "guard someone". Keep them safe is the idea.

And "in Your name," He says, "Keep them safe in Your name." Which means "in Your person" or "in the faith". In other words, Jesus prays for the disciples to stay in the faith. He prays that they would not fall away like Judas did. They're about to watch someone totally apostatize. They're about to watch the greatest traitor in all of human history, and Jesus says, "Lord, don't let them be influenced by that guy." And He says in verse 12, He says, "While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition (which is Judas), so that the Scriptures would be fulfilled." And now, the idea is that Jesus is asking God to continue that. "While I was with them," He says, "I kept them, I guarded them, I protect them, none of them perished. And now, Father, I'm committing them into Your hands." Which is interesting, because if you study the lives of these disciples, you'll see that none of them perished spiritually. They all stayed in the faith. They were all martyred, but one. If you ever get a chance to look up the way these guys died, it was horrific. Peter was crucified upside down, history says, after watching His wife crucified. One of the men, it was Matthew, I believe, was skinned alive. But they stayed in the faith. Why? Because Jesus prayed for them. That's why. Because He asked the Father to guard them spiritually.

He also prayed for their joy. That's the second part of this prayer. He prayed for the disciples' joy. If you look in verse 13, it says, "But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves." Several times on this occasion, Jesus talked about the joy He would give His disciples. So, in chapter 16:20, He says, "You will grieve, but your grief will be turned to joy." Then in chapter 16:22, He says, "But I will see you again and your heart will rejoice and no one will take your joy from you." In other words, "You're about to see Me nailed to a cross, you're about to see Me betrayed by one of our own,

and yet I'm praying for your joy. I don't want you to be miserable." I told you before, God doesn't want the frozen chosen, baptized in vinegar, right? He doesn't want - we could call them dreary disciples. He wants them to have joy. And He says, "It's My joy, or the joy I have with the Father." This is the joy Jesus has from His relationship with God, a joy that will last through all the trials.

That leads us quickly to a third thing Jesus prays for concerning these men. And that is their sanctification. If you look in verses 14 through 17, He prays for their sanctification. And He says,

14 I've given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

The word "sanctify" there means "to make something holy" or "set it apart for God". Jesus prays that God would do that for the disciples. And He says, "Do it in the truth, for Your word is truth." In other words, "Set them apart through Scripture. Make them holy through the study of Your word." And I can't say a lot about every point in this passage for the sake of time, but I can say a few words on this last one. I'll put it in the form of a question, do you ever pray for your sanctification? It's a big word there. But it means to be made holy, to be set apart from evil things - do you ever pray for that? Do you ever read your Bible and ask for God's help in living it out?

I don't know if you guys ever heard this before; they tell you not to pray for patience because you'll have to earn it. You guys ever heard that before? If you pray for patience, God will make you suffer to get it. Can I tell you that nowhere in the Bible does it ever tell you not to pray for patience? Nowhere does God say, "Don't look for this virtue." They tell you, "Don't pray for humility or God will humble you. Don't pray for meekness or you'll have to show it to someone. You'll have to be meek." The Bible tells you to pray for those things. We're supposed to read our Bibles, see what it says, and then pray for God's help in living it out.

A man once told D. L Moody that he had lived for several years on a mountaintop with God. He called it "The Mount of Transfiguration". So, Moody asked him, he said, "Well, how many people did you lead to Christ on that mountain? How much patience and humility and meekness did you learn up there?" And the man said, "None. I learned none because I was all by myself." To which Moody replied, "Then I wouldn't call it 'The Mount of Transfiguration' then, because you're still the same." So, this is what this passage is saying, your prayer life needs to change you. Your prayer life needs to make you different. You need to be transformed. You need to be sanctified. You need to be made more like Christ. That's what Jesus prayed for these men. He didn't pray for them to have an easy life. He didn't pray for them to be wealthy, healthy and rich. He prayed for them to be sanctified, "Keep in Your name." He later said, "I didn't take them out of the world, I left them in the world so that they would glorify You."

That leads to one more thing Jesus prays for on the night before He dies. Just to go over these again, He prays for Himself. He says, "Father, the hour has come, glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You." And He prays for the disciples. He says, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your

word is truth. Make them holy.” It leads to one more thing He prays for, which is the most encouraging one of all. I think this is the most amazing thing - He prays for us. That's the third thing He prays for here in the night before He dies. He prays for us. Let me tell you, tell me if this doesn't blow your mind: even though you weren't at this supper, even though you weren't in the Garden of Gethsemane, you were still on the mind of Jesus Christ. Even though you didn't live 2,000 years ago, even though you weren't standing there during this conversation, during this prayer, He still prayed for you. That's incredible, isn't it? Not only did He die for you, He prayed for you before He died. You were on His mind. If you look in verse 18, verse 18 says,

18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. 20 I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21 that they may all be one; even 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 sent me.”

That phrase there in verse 20, “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word,” that's a reference to us. You believe because of the word of the apostles. You are a Christian because of what they wrote in Scripture. Which means that at this moment in time, at this moment in history, Jesus was praying for the believers right here in this room and all across the world.

If you notice in verse 21, it says that He prays that, “They may all be one, even as You Father are in Me and I in You.” Jesus doesn't pray that they may be two, He prays that they may be one. He doesn't pray that we may be 20 or 30 or 40 churches, but that we may be one together and fully unified. He says, “Even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You.” You can't get any closer than the members of the Trinity. You can't get any closer than Jesus was to the Father. And that's how close Jesus prays for us to be.

And He prays this, it says, “So that the world may believe that you sent Me.” In other words, He prays this so that the world may look at the church and say, “Why do they love each other like that? Why do they care for each other like that?” and they may believe. There you see the word again, the word “believe” that's repeated so often in the Gospel of John. “I want them to do this,” Jesus says, “so that the world may believe.”

It's been said that you may be the only Bible some people ever read. And this church may be the only church some people ever see or ever know about. We've had people come through our church, even in the short time we've been in existence, who have never set foot in a church before. I've talked to some people, visited with them, who have never talked to a pastor before. One of the ways you influence them for Christ, one of the ways you help them to believe is to be unified. That's what Jesus prays for here. “So, that the world will know that our faith is real.”

When the Protestant Reformation was underway in the 16th century, one of the criticisms of the Catholic Church was that the reformers were going to split the church into tiny pieces. They were going to divide it everywhere with one church popping up here and another church popping up there, and they were right. That happened. The Reformation did that. But it also showed where our true unity lies. It's not in Popes or Bishops. It's not in counsellors or creeds – it's in

Jesus Christ. There's always been an element of unity in the true church, not the false church, not the tares and the goats. But the true church, there's always been a bond between true believers in Christ.

You guys have told me about this. You go to another country, people you don't even know, you go to a church, and you've got a connection with those people, don't you? You have something in common with them. When I came here to Grace Fellowship, I'd visited Canada one time when I was 13-years-old. I went to Windsor and back in like 10 minutes, I think. We just crossed the border, said, "Oh, there's Canada, come back." That was it. But when I came here, we had a bond, right? Because we're believers in Christ. Because Jesus prayed for that. He asked for it, right here.

You can look at history and the lives of men like George Whitfield and John Wesley or Martin Luther and John Calvin or Charles Spurgeon and J. C. Ryle, they didn't agree on a lot, but they agreed on this. They had their disagreements, but they trusted in Christ, and that united them. It made them one. "Even as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You." In fact, J. C. Ryle himself said,

The unity which our Lord prays for here is not unity of forms, discipline or government, but unity of heart, mind, and soul. There may be uniformity without unity as is visible in many churches today, but the unity which our Lord prays for here is that true, substantial, spiritual, internal heart unity which undoubtedly exists among all true members of Christ. It is the unity which results from one spirit, saving one people through one Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. It's this unity which shakes the world and obliges it to confess the truth of the Christian faith.

Let's say it like this, this was Jesus' dying prayer. This was one of the last things He asked for before the cross, because it meant that much to Him. And it should mean that much to us today. We should pray for and strive for unity as a church. We shouldn't be so quick to fight each other. I've told you before, if you have ten Christians in a room, you have 50 different opinions, and you often have a fight on your hands. It shouldn't be that way. We shouldn't be so quick to attack and divide the church. There will be a time to stand for truth, there will be a time to fight for doctrine in love and those kinds of things, but it's not all the time. We don't fight all the time because Jesus prayed for us to be one.

This leads us back to where we started all this, let me just wrap this up with the same question I began with, how often do you pray? According to the report, 20% of Canadians do it every day, just a small percentage. But how much do you pray? And when you pray, what do you pray for? Do you pray for God's glory and for your sanctification? Do you pray for unity and to be one with other believers? If you're in an argument with someone, if you're in the midst of a fight, do you pray that it will get resolved? Let me ask this another way, do you need encouragement in your prayer life? Do you need a little pick-me-up? Here's the pick-me-up right here in this passage. Jesus prayed for you right here 2,000 years ago. You were on His mind. He thought about you. And if that doesn't encourage you to pray, I don't know what will. I mean, if that doesn't light a fire in your soul, nothing can.

Let's stoke the fire a little more, He is still praying for you today, right now. The Scriptures say He's making intercession for you, He is your Advocate. He's doing it right here at this very moment. This has been called His high priestly ministry. As our great high priest, He takes the request to the Father for us. And that should be a wonderful encouragement for all of us.

During His lifetime, John Knox earned the nickname, "The Fiery Reformer" for His courage in the pulpit, and for leading Scotland out of the dark ages. It was said about John Knox that he was so bold that the most amazing thing about him was that he died of natural causes. They thought anybody that bold is surely going to get beheaded or burned or something. But as he was dying, this very, very brave man was anxious. He was worried about passing on to the next life. And so, he asked his wife to read John 17 to him. He asked her to read this on his death bed because he said, "This is where I cast my anchor when I was first saved, and this is where I cast it now." He said, "Jesus prayed for me then, when I first came to faith, and He will pray for me now as I leave this earth." Can you say that today? Do you believe that Jesus is praying for you? Is this where you cast your anchor?

I came across a passage this week that said, "He who is the bread of life, began His ministry hungry. And He who is the water of life, ended it in thirst. And He who received prayer, prayed for us." The Son of God prayed for us. And I hope that encourages you this morning. Let's take that encouragement to Jesus and thank Him for it. I can think of no better way to end than to pray back to this wonderful and merciful Saviour. Let's pray together. We often begin our prayers with "heavenly Father," but I think we could begin this prayer with "heavenly Son."

Heavenly Jesus, Almighty Saviour, we thank you Lord for what You have demonstrated here. Not just an example to pray, which is huge for us, but a reminder that You love us this deeply. Of all the things to pray for in the night before You died, You prayed for us. That encourages us in ways we can't explain, Lord. That blesses us beyond what words can't even express.

So, Lord, I do pray for any who are here this morning who don't know what we're talking about here, when we talk about this intimacy with You, this prayer life with You. Father, if there's any here who are lost, I pray You would drive them to the cross. I pray You would let them know there is forgiveness and mercy because there is this type of Saviour for them. And they would come and believe this morning for the first time.

I pray for the believers who are here, Lord, that our prayer lives would improve and we would grow in this. And we would begin to pray more and live more for Your glory and sanctification and unity. Lord, may I pray that we would have a unified church. May I pray that we would have a place where people can come and know that those people love one another. Those people care about each other. And may we do it so the world may see and believe in You.

Thank you, Father, for this passage of Scripture. Jesus, thank you for what You have said here. We pray as we continue this study and dive into the cross next week or dive into the arrest and the betrayal, Your glory would continue. And you would continue to be honoured in it. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.