

Session 3

February 7, 2021

INTIMACY WITH GOD

John 17:1-5, 21-26

This is the epitome of human drama.

Jesus has completed the first phase of His ministry. Early on, He preached to multitudes about the kingdom of God. He healed the sick, restored sight to the blind, and promised abundant life to those who seek God. Later, the multitudes left Him, the religious leaders attacked Him, and the cross was beckoning Him. But none of this was surprising; He Himself had predicted it (see Luke 9:22 et al.), because He Himself had ordained it (see John 10:18). These final weeks had been dedicated to equipping His disciples to carry on the work He had begun. Here, in the midst of the final, dramatic twenty-four hours of His earthly life, Jesus offers an intercessory prayer that not only demonstrates the compassion He felt for His followers, but also reveals the intimacy He maintained within the godhead. In it, Jesus models the intimacy with God for which all believers should strive.

To be glorified with Him (vv. 1-5). It may seem strange that the Son of God would ask to be glorified by the Father, since He is already “one” with the Father (see v. 22, below). But we need to remember that that perfect union was somehow disrupted when Jesus took on human flesh (see Phil. 2:6-8). Jesus’ plea involves five factors. First, there is *reciprocation*. He sees His death, burial, and resurrection as components of His glorification that will in turn glorify the Father (v. 1). Then there is *cooperation*. The Son received authority to give eternal life to those whom the Father appointed for Him (v. 2). Next, there is *identification*. Here, Jesus identifies what it means to have eternal life: to know God the Father, and to know God the Son (v. 3). Then there is *participation*. Christ honored God by His obedience (v. 4; see also John 8:29). Finally, there is *exaltation*. The plain plea of the prayer is that the Second person of the Trinity might be fully, intimately, and eternally reunited with the godhead (v. 5). For reflection: *The Phil. 2 passage suggests Jesus emptied Himself of something when He became a man. But that would make Jesus less than God! A better way to see that is rather than Jesus setting something aside, He actually took on something He never had before: a human form. As such, it placed certain voluntary limitations on His earthly life.*

To be unified with Him (vv. 20-23). By this section of the prayer, the theme is unity. Five times in these four verses, Jesus uses the word “one.” The most intriguing truth of this passage is the fact that Jesus Christ included *us* in His prayer. I know of no other time when we—modern day believers—are literally prayed for by the Lord. But that’s what happened in verse 20: “I pray not only for these, *but also for those who believe in Me through their message.*” In other words, Jesus prayed for those who would ultimately accept Him by the witness of His disciples. Trace that back far enough in time, and you will realize that we all have come to Christ through someone who heard it, from someone who heard it, from someone who heard it...all the way back to the one of the Twelve! The unity He asks for covers three areas. There is a prayer for unity in *fellowship* (v. 21); a prayer for unity in *purpose* (vv. 21, 23); and a prayer for unity in *love* (v. 23). For reflection: *How do we square the concept of Christian unity with what Jesus said about His mission in Matthew 10:34-36?*

To be loved by Him (vv. 24-26). That we might be drawn into intimacy with the Father is continued in these verses as well. The requests are fourfold. First, Christ prays that His followers might *be with Him* (v. 24). Then, He prays that they might *see His glory* (v. 24). Third, He prays that they may *know the Father* (v. 25). Finally, He prays that they might *experience the divine love* shared between the Father and Son. How amazing...that the Lord Jesus prayed that His followers (including us) would share in the most intimate of relationships! For reflection: *In what ways did God answer Christ's prayer? What should our response be to His gracious intercession on our behalf?*