



Text: John 17:20-26¹

Series: *Life in His Name* – The Message of John’s Gospel

Title: Part 37 – “Jesus, what’s on your heart?” (3)

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A few years ago now, Rick Warren, the founding pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, published a book that changed the way in which many people understood the Christian life. His best-selling book, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, opened with these simple, but challenging words...

“It’s not about you.”

Warren went on...

“The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It’s far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born by his purpose and for his purpose.”²

We’ve been making our way through Jesus’ prayer in John 17, normally referred to as Jesus’ “High Priestly Prayer.” But this morning I want to suggest another name for it. I’d like us to think of it as...

Jesus’ Purpose-Driven Prayer

Let me tell you why. There is a little word that appears eighteen times throughout this prayer. It’s the little Greek word, “hina” and it’s roughly translated as “so that.” It’s a little word that is used to make the connection between one thing and another. This happens “so that” this happens. This is done “so that” this will occur. The reason we do this is “so that” this might be the result. It’s a word that indicates, you may have guessed it, **purpose**, and it appears throughout Jesus’ prayer.

For example, in the first section of Jesus’ prayer, verses one to five, in which Jesus prays about his relationship with his Father, Jesus prayed:

“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.”
John 17:1

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission, All rights reserved.

² Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, Zondervan, 2002, p. 17.



The word “that” is hina. The purpose of the Son’s glorification was “so that” the Father would be glorified.

And in the second section of the prayer, verses six to nineteen, where Jesus prays for his disciples, he prayed...

“Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.” John 17:11

Again, the word “that” is hina. The purpose of keeping believers loyal to the name of the Father was “so that” they might be united as the Father and Son are united in purpose.

Although this little word occurs eighteen times throughout Jesus’ prayer it’s concentrated heavily in the final seven verses that we’re going to look at today. Nine of the eighteen uses occur in these last seven verses of John chapter 17. As Jesus comes to the end of his prayer, **his mind is focused on the question of purpose**. And so he prays, “Father,...

²⁰ **“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ 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. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.**

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 have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵ O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”**

First of all, let’s think together about...

Jesus’ earthly purpose for His Church³

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one” John 17:20-21

³ In this message I’ve borrowed significant portions from R. Kent Hughes, *John : That You May Believe*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1999), 406.



Jesus again prayed for the oneness of the church as he already had done in verse eleven. He was concerned about his people's love, holiness, and mission, but in his final earthly prayer he made unity his overriding concern. If it was his dominant concern in this, his last earthly prayer, I think it only stands to reason that unity must also be his dominant concern as he prays for us today. True, it isn't his only concern but as Jesus intercedes for us today at the right hand of the Father (Rom 8:34) we can be sure that these themes are a major part of his prayer for us.

Jesus is emphatic about **the nature of this unity**. He states it three times for accent:

“that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you” v.21

“that they may be one even as we are one” v.22

“I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one” v.23

Jesus prays for a supernatural unity that is modeled and enabled by the Godhead. This unity is possible because true believers are united in the core of their beings. That is why we often can sense that we have met another believer before words have even been spoken. Jesus Christ is in us!

Years ago, I went to play golf at a course in Toronto where I didn't normally play. I signed in at the pro shop and was directed to the first tee box and the pro told me that there were two men who would be joining me at the first tee so I stood at the tee box and waited for them. I could see them walking toward me from the pro shop from some distance away and immediately in my spirit came a sense that they were believers in Jesus. As we exchanged greetings at the first tee I found out very quickly that these men were elders in a Pentecostal church and they were just trying to get in a few holes of golf before their elders meeting that night. This spiritual recognition was a rare occurrence – however I have to say that it has happened in other situations as well – but there is a supernatural identity that is given to us because we are believers in Jesus. Paul wrote...

“For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.” Colossians 2:9-10

The closer we draw to Jesus, the closer we draw to one another. Our unity can be described as an inverted cone, with God at the top and believers around the base. As we ascend the slopes of the cone, drawing nearer to God, we draw closer to our fellow believers. At the pinnacle, in God, we are closer to one another than we could ever possibly be if we focused on our human connections.

John absorbed the truth of Jesus' prayer in a wonderful way and he later wrote in his First Letter...



“that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.” 1 John 1:3

Christian unity is supernatural because it comes from God’s nature and is only experienced in its fullness as we draw close to him: **“that they may be one even as we are one” v.22**

That unity, though, does not mean uniformity in everything. In the Trinity there exists a unity in diversity—three distinct Persons, yet they are one. Kent Hughes paints a great picture of this unity in the midst of diversity. Hughes wrote...

“Suppose, for a moment, that we could bring some of the great Christians of the centuries together under one roof. From the fourth century would come the great intellect Augustine of Hippo. From the tenth century, Bernard of Clairvaux. From the sixteenth, the peerless reformer John Calvin. From the [eighteenth] century would come John Wesley, the great Methodist preacher, and along with him George Whitefield, the evangelist. From the nineteenth century, the Baptist C. H. Spurgeon and D. L. Moody. And, finally, from the twentieth century, Billy Graham. If we gathered all these men under one steeple ... we would be unable to get a unanimous vote on many things. But underneath it all would be unity. And the more [these] men lifted up Christ and the more they focused on him, the greater their unity would be. There would be unity amidst a great diversity of style and opinion.”

This week I registered for a conference that I plan to attend in April of next year. I attended the same conference four years ago. It’s attended by thousands of pastors from all across Canada, the United States and from overseas. There are Baptists, and Presbyterians, and Charismatics, and Anglicans and people from all kinds of denominational stripes. There are plenty of differences among us but there is a remarkable degree of unity as well because we are, as the title of the conference declares, **“Together for the Gospel.”** We all believe that God has sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to be the Saviour of the world. We all believe that there is no other Saviour. We all believe that there is no other Gospel than the one that Paul declared when he wrote...

“that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

Christ’s prayer for unity does not mean we all should be the same, though many Christians mistakenly assume that. Too many people think other believers should be just like them—carry the same Bible, read the same books, listen to the same music, promote the same styles, educate their children in the same way, have



the same likes and dislikes. That would be **uniformity, not unity**. We are not called to be Christian clones. In fact, the insistence that others be just like us is one of the most **divisive** forces in the church of Jesus Christ. It breeds a judgmental inflexibility that propels people away from the church with deadly force. One of the gospel's glories is that it values our individuality even while bringing us into unity. The principle of unity without uniformity is embedded in Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts.

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone” 1 Corinthians 12:4-6

As John Stott has pointed out, the unity that Jesus longs for is not only a unity among present believers, but an historic unity with the apostolic church and its teaching. Jesus prayed in verse 20:

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,

John Stott wrote:

It is first and foremost a prayer that there may be an historical continuity between the church of the first century and the church of subsequent centuries; that the church's faith may not change but remain recognizably the same; that the church of every age may merit the title “apostolic” because it is loyal to the teaching of the apostles.²

Much of my academic work in my years of training was in the area of church history. I came away from the study of history of the Christian experience with a profound sense of the continuity of the church of Jesus Christ down through the ages. There were times down through the centuries when the Gospel was preached by greater numbers of preachers but there was never a time when the Gospel was not preached!

Last week we noted that the essence of Jesus' prayer for his disciples in verses six to nineteen was that they would be loyal to the Father and the Son and to the Gospel message entrusted to them by the Father and the Son. And Jesus prays that same thing for us. He prays that we would be “one” with the message of the Gospel communicated in the preaching of the apostles and transmitted down through the centuries in the pages of the Bible. The unity for which the Savior prays is a unity that spans the ages, that comes from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and that grows as we draw nearer to God by being rooted and strengthened in his Word. We are never closer to one another than when our hearts are genuinely focused on God and His Word.

² John Stott, *Christ the Liberator* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1971), pp. 82–83.



This Biblical pursuit of unity is extremely important. Jesus explains why in verses 21 and 23:

“so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” v.21

“so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.” v.23

Through Christian unity some in the world will come to understand that believers are loved by God even as he loves his own Son! What a breathtaking idea! The Greek translated “even as” means “**just as**” or “**to the same degree that.**” Jesus is telling us that God loves those who belong to Jesus *to the same degree and in the same way* that he loves Christ!

On Friday I went with Ruth to Calgary. She had an appointment and so, after dropping her off, I took my Bible and my note pad to the local Swiss Chalet so that I could do some work while I ate my lunch. As I meditated on this passage tears came to my eyes ... right there in the middle of the restaurant! If these words hadn't come from the mouth of Jesus I'd have been tempted to discount the enormity of what I was reading. I found myself without words to express the wonder of this truth but I remembered the song that Stephanie and her group were playing for the offertory today. I don't know if this verse had prompted Stephanie's choice of music but I'm so grateful for Stuart Townend's words as I attempted to grasp the wonder of the truth that I was reading...

**“How deep the Father's love for us
How vast beyond all measure
That he should give his only Son
To make a wretch his treasure...”**

To a world that is hungry for true connection, God offers the example of his love for those who believe in Jesus. Listen to me carefully:

If we are to fulfill the purpose Jesus has for his church in this world we need to be swept up, out of our depth, by the Father's love for us!

Our experience of God's love for those of us who believe in Jesus isn't just for ourselves! You see, it's not about you! It's about the world! It's about God reaching the world through you and me! God has so designed his outreach to the world that he intends that **our rapture will lead to capture!** Again, it seems that John grasped the truth of Jesus' prayer to a wonderful degree. In his First Letter he wrote...

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not



know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.” 1 John 4:7-12

“No one has ever seen God...” **but *he is made visible*** when we make his love visible in our love for one another! Thomas Manton said, “Divisions in the church breed atheism in the world.”⁴ The converse is also true: unity with God in the church builds belief in the world. In view of that, there is scarcely anything more important than Jesus’ prayer for genuine unity in the church. This unity is a oneness in truth and spirit that comes by drawing close to Jesus and shows itself in love. In verse 22 we see how Jesus implements it:

“The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,” v.22

What does Jesus mean? What is “the glory” that he’s given to us? Let’s look back at the beginning of his prayer. Jesus prayed...

“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.” John 17:1

The glory he’s referring to is the glory of the Cross. The hour of the Cross had come. As Bruce Milne puts it, Jesus is referring to “the glory of the revelation of the Father through the Son, completed by the cross and resurrection.”⁴ The glory that Jesus gives us is the glory of the Gospel of the Cross; it’s the glory of a life lived under the cross of Jesus Christ. And it’s a life that is lived as we follow Jesus. Jesus said...

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” Luke 9:23

The kind of unity that catches the world’s attention and leads it to belief in Jesus is a people who live this cross-bearing life. The Apostle Paul summarizes the glorious “Cross-life” that Jesus desires in his letter to the Ephesians. Paul wrote...

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness,

⁴ Stott, *Christ the Liberator*, p. 11.

⁴ Bruce Milne, *The Message of John : Here Is Your King! :with Study Guide*, The Bible speaks today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 248.



with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:1-3

I once heard a prominent Christian writer refer to Jesus’ prayer for the unity of the church so that the world would believe as **one of Jesus’ “unanswered prayers.”** The reason he said that was because he was thinking of unity in organizational terms. It’s a simple fact today that there are thousands of Christian denominations and groups around the world. If organizational unity was the focus of Jesus’ prayer then this writer’s contention was correct. But organizational unity wasn’t the focus of his prayer. Jesus’ was praying for a “oneness” with God that is found in deep union with God, expressed in our lives and seen by the world.

Jesus’ prayer is answered every time the world sees believers respond to a need out of the love of Christ. It’s answered every time the world sees believers in the Gospel love each other with the love of Jesus. Brothers and sisters, that prayer is answered every time someone says to you or to me, “You have something that I don’t have. You have a peace in the midst of heartache that I don’t have. You have a trust in the face of loss that I don’t have. You have a love for people that I don’t have. Tell me about it because I want it, I need it.”

But Jesus’ purpose for his church isn’t limited to this world. Jesus has a purpose that goes beyond time and into eternity.

Jesus’ heavenly purpose for His Church

Jesus prayed...

“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.” v.24

This isn’t the first time that Jesus has spoken of our being with Jesus where he is. When he had first told his disciples that he was leaving to return to the Father they had been troubled by the prospect of his leaving. But Jesus calmed them with his promise...

“I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” John 14:4

Bruce Milne may be permitted a little purple in his prose when he observed that...

‘With me’ is the language of love. The beloved longs for the lover’s presence. So Jesus, in these final moments, as the last grains of sand



trickle through the hour glass before his rendezvous with darkness, gazes across the rolling aeons of the future and anticipates the embrace of his beloved bride in the glory that is to be.⁵

The word translated as “see” has the sense of seeing on and on. For all eternity we will gaze on the wonder of the glory of Jesus. Forever we will be, as the hymn writer Charles Wesley put it, “lost in wonder, love and praise.”

And here again, John grasped the wonder of Jesus’ vision. But like me, he was speechless to describe the immensity of this truth. All he could do was grab onto Jesus and hold tight. He wrote...

“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” 1 John 3:2

How will these prayers come to pass? Their vision is so immense, their hope and expectation so grand that only God himself can accomplish these things ... *and he does!*

Jesus’ eternal vow to His Church

is this...

“O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” John 17:25-26

Jesus closes his prayer with a vow to the Father, but it is also a promise to us. He will continue to make his name (meaning all that he is) known to us and also will be increasing the Father’s love in us. That is his sovereign vow, and it will be our continuing experience. Jesus’ purpose for his church on earth and in heaven will be accomplished because he himself will enable it to be accomplished.

Some will experience more of this in this life than others. Why? They clearly see the passion of Christ’s earthly prayer for his church and are drawn near to him, feed on his Word, and humbly serve one another. Some will allow the Lord to show them more of the Father’s love for them day by day. And as Jesus fills our spirits to overflowing with the knowledge of our heavenly Father’s love for us, Jesus fulfills his vow in us and we become a part of the answer to His prayer.

⁵Bruce Milne, *The Message of John : Here Is Your King! :with Study Guide*, The Bible speaks today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 251.



I think it's appropriate to close this study on Jesus' purpose-driven prayer with a prayer from someone in whom Jesus had done his work. The Apostle Paul prayed...

“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Ephesians 3:14-19

May our response to the ongoing prayer of Jesus for his church be, “Even so come, Lord Jesus!” Amen.

- **Songs of Communion:**
 - **How Deep the Father's Love for Us**
 - **I Will Sing of My Redeemer**
- **Benediction**

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” Ephesians 3:20-21