

May 16, 2010
Easter 7

"Jesus Prays for Us"

JOHN 17:20-26

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.

Those of you who knew Lorenz Heinze can remember how devoted he was to praying for people who had needs. In fact he kept a little notebook in his pocket that he used to keep the names of people for whom he prayed. This congregation has been blessed with dear Christians who regularly pray for each other and for those who have special needs.

In these words just read to you from John 17, you were privileged to hear Jesus praying to his heavenly Father for all those who would someday believe in him. He started praying for himself. Then he prayed for his disciples. Then he prayed for all the people who would believe in him as their Lord and God and Savior. How amazing it is to know that at this very moment Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father and praying or interceding for us. As much as we appreciate the prayers of our fellow Christians here in this congregation, we appreciate even more the very real prayers that Jesus is praying for us.

He prays for us to be one with him and the Father

Listen again to Jesus praying for you. "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message." Think of all the people who have come to believe in Jesus through the message that is found in this book, the Holy Bible. Next Sunday we will be offering people free Bibles at a booth in Waller Park. We do this because the Lord Jesus works through this Word to bring people to believe in him. "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you might have life through his name."

Jesus wants all the people who come to believe in him to be one with him and one with the Father. "That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I in you. May they also be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." When you become a Christian, you become one with Jesus and one with the Father. This of course does not mean that you become part of God. Pantheism teaches that you become one with nature and part of everything you see as John Denver once sang, "I am a part

of everything I see." Jesus teaches us that we are one with him the way a branch is connected to the Vine. We are one with him the way a child is part of a family. God is our Father, we are his children and Jesus is our brother. We become one with God through Jesus the way a husband and wife become one in marriage. Jesus is the bridegroom and we are his beloved bride the church. Jesus is the head and we are his body the church. Being one with Jesus and the Father tells how close we are to Jesus and the Father in this life and for all eternity.

Only Jesus can put you into a position where you are one with him and the Father. You can never achieve this position on your own. He does this by giving us his glory as he says in this prayer to his Father, "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one." Jesus earned glory from his heavenly Father by the perfect life he lived on this earth and the perfect sacrifice on the cross to pay for sin. Jesus gives you that glory that he had with the Father. By removing your debt load of sin, and placing your perfect life into your account, he gives you the glory or the grades you need to be accepted by your Father and close to your Father and one with your Father. He gives you all A+'s. It cost you nothing.

You really appreciate what Jesus is praying for here when you realize how far sin has separated you from God. Jesus spoke of the evil that comes out of the human heart when he said, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." An oil well that spews out toxic crude oil cannot begin to compare to the sin that comes out of the heart and makes us unclean and unacceptable to our God. The things I do wrong which appear to be finite become infinite when they are committed against an infinite and holy God. They cannot be contained or cured unless God himself provides the cure. Jesus brought glory to his Father and to us by removing the sin that separates us from our God. We look at the cross of Jesus. We look at his open tomb and rejoice that we are one with God. He is our heavenly Father and we are his children. In Psalm 22 it says that Jesus is not ashamed to call us his brothers and his sisters not because of any glory in us, but because of the glory he had with his Father.

Jesus wants this unity or closeness we have with him and the Father to take up even more space in our daily lives. That is why he prays: "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." When you know how close you are to your heavenly Father and to Jesus, you want to experience the full measure of this closeness that you enjoy. You want it to take up more space in your mind and heart and how you live. This past week in our Thursday Bible study we read the prayer of St Patrick called the Lorica. It helps us see how close we are to Jesus and the Father. "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me, Christ in the eye that sees me, Christ in the ear that hears me."

Jesus prays for us to see his glory

Jesus also prays that we might someday see first hand the glory he has with the Father. "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." On

this very special night, the night before he died, Jesus yearned and longed to see the glory he had with the Father before the world began. Earlier in this prayer he prayed, "And now Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." We know that the glory Jesus had with his Father from all eternity was something very special, unlike anything we can imagine. In John 1 it tells us, "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only (only begotten) who is at the Father's side had made him known."

Last week our reading from Revelation 21 told us about the very special place, the heavenly Jerusalem, we have with Jesus and our Father when we see them in glory. "The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever."

The glory of this present world is so fleeting and so shallow compared to the glory that we will have when we share in the glory that Jesus had with his Father long before the creation of the world. People look for glory in the riches of this world. Jesus said that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses. We look for glory in the pursuit of pleasure, but that gets old and boring. We look for glory in our relationships with people, but then people disappoint us and we lose hope in them. We look for glory in ourselves and with time, we finally realize how far we fall short of God's glory and even our own expectations. Jesus prays that all of us might come to a greater realization of how beautiful the glory is that he has waiting for us.

At the beginning of this sermon I mentioned the name of Lorenz Heinze. He worked on parts for the Hubble telescope which has captured pictures of the stars and distant galaxies. The night before they turned on the telescope for the first time, Lorenz did not sleep. What if the part he had helped design did not work? When you look at the glory of the stars and the distant universe, it is insignificant to the glory the Lord has waiting for you.

When Christians die, they immediately see and experience the glory that Jesus had with his Father before the world began. Remember that time when Stephen confessed his faith in Jesus and they took him out to stone him to death. Before he died he was allowed to see Jesus in his glory. Acts 7 says this of Stephen, "But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God." Then he said, "Look, I see heaven open and he Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." I can still see Lorenz sitting in that chair, the Sunday morning when he died just as we began our Bible class. What did his eyes see when he breathed his last? What will our eyes see as we pass from this life to the next life? What did your loved one who died in Jesus see in their last moments of life? As we listen to Jesus pray we know what we will see, "I want those you have given me to see my glory."

He prays for us to know his Father's love

O, dear Christian, the Savior who loves you and prays for you, asks his Father for even more blessings for you. He prays that you might know and experience even more how

much your Father loves you. "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you sent me. 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." When Jesus talked to people about his heavenly Father, it made a deep impression on them because of the loving way Jesus spoke about his Father. In fact Jesus' enemies want to kill him because he spoke in such a way as if God were his Father. Jesus prays that we might know even more of the love that his Father had for him, and the love that he had for the Father, and the love the Father has for us.

This morning I want to ask you a very personal question that profoundly affects every facet of your life on this earth. How many special places do you think Jesus has already planned for you, where he will come to you and make his Father's love even more real to you? It means so much to know that people are praying for us, but it means even more to us to know that Jesus is praying for us that we might know even more of the love the Father has for us, and the glory that waits for us, and the oneness and closeness we enjoy with Jesus, and the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.