

THE GOSPEL OF BELIEF - Studies in John's Gospel

Part sixty-four - Sunday, January 4th, 2015, 10:00 a.m.

Teaching #1773 - Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church

THE REAL PROBLEM OF EVIL - IS THERE ANY WAY A HOLY GOD CAN LOVE A SINFUL WORLD?

John 17:20-26 - "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."

Today's text expands the reach of Jesus' discipleship prayer - "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word...." (20). "**These only**" are the original eleven Apostles listening to Jesus' words. "**Those who will believe in me through their word**" are all who will place trust in Jesus Christ, God the Son. You and I are prayed for by our Lord. We have been reached, thankfully, through the faithfully received and recorded words of these first disciples. Against all odds and through the fire of much persecution they stood firm in revealed truth.

We need to think about this. Had the first Apostles held absolute propositional truth with the same light grip as much of today's church you and I would be lost. There would be no remaining body of revealed truth to which we could anchor our salvation. These Apostles were all executed (all but one) as punishment for their **intolerance to blending or bending or diminishing the words they received from Jesus**. They called the world around them - the **religious** world around them - to **leave** false beliefs and embrace true beliefs.

That's the only reason the church today is even in a position to **reject** or **dilute** the Christian faith. We at least **have** a faith to accept or reject or pervert. We have been given a definitive, recorded, fixed body of propositional revelation. Not everyone **embraces** it. But they can all **read** it.

There's something else very precious in our text. **We** are just as loved and prayed for by our Lord as **they**. Jesus sets His **attention** and His **affection** on us in this prayer. We are beholding this wonderful, all-seeing peripheral vision of God the Son as He intercedes for His church down through the ages.

How easy it is to do **religious "talk"** about Jesus being "**with us**" here today and quote "**where two or three are gathered in my name,**" without actually considering the love and value Jesus places on **our** church and **this particular meeting** and **your particular involvement** in His kingdom.

How did Jesus actually **feel** in His pure heart about Peter and James and John in that personal prayer time in John chapter 17? Was this a half-hearted prayer? Or was it intense, passionate, and full-blooded? How much did they capture His love and divine attention? Was there any part of their lives He **didn't** care about?

And then the text changes. Jesus looks at His **future** church as it responds to His words - as His words are passed on through these Apostles - and He loves and intercedes for **that** church - **our** church - **this** gathering.

This matters greatly. If the next time you feel some inclination to self-indulgence and compromise you think of Jesus as **removed** or **unengaged** emotionally from your next step into emptiness you will find spiritual neglect all that much easier. But if you remember that in our text, Jesus **played the tape of His church forward and prayed for your faithfulness** - and if you remember that He **cares about your faithfulness as much as He cared for Peter's or James' or John's** - you will find strength in the love and care and ever-present **mindfulness** of your Lord.

Now into the rest of our text:

1) WHAT HOPE DID JESUS HAVE FOR A SINFUL WORLD BEING UNITED TO A HOLY GOD?

John 17:20-21a - "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....”

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We'll look at the rest of this verse in just a minute. But notice the two ideas in Jesus' words just here. As people come to believe in Jesus, the Christ, they are deeply united to the Father and the Son. A profound spiritual transformation takes place that Jesus can only describe as being **“in us”** (that is, **in** the Father and the Son) - **“....that they also [those who believe] may be in us”** (21a).

So these people **weren't** in the Son and Father before. They were on the **outside**. They were **“of the world.”** But a miracle has taken place. The biggest change imaginable for a human being has taken these **“outsiders”** and brought them **“into”** divine life. They are **“in” the Father and the Son**.

That's the result. But how did this happen? We are told they **“believed”** (20), but **what** did they believe? Does the **content** of the belief matter? Or just the **sincerity**?

And now we come face to face with one of those radical New Testament revelations that is deemed unacceptable to our cultural conditioning. Jesus is going to unpack the single most **offensive** of the **“words”** **He received from Father God - John 17:8** - **“For I have given them the words that you gave me....”**

All-knowing Jesus - God the Son - peers into the entire future of His church and recognizes **no faith is capable of uniting man to God except that which is produced and nourished by the recorded words of His Apostles**.

This is the clear meaning of Jesus' words in **John 17:20-21** - **“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....”**

There is nothing to do but string the logic of these thoughts together. If we are going to be **“in”** the Father and the Son (21a), it will only come about through **believing in Jesus the Christ**. That's what Jesus means when He speaks of those **“who will believe in me”** (20). And the only way they will come to such faith is through **“their word”** (20). **“Their word”** is the recorded words of the Apostles.

See the chain of revelation. Jesus gave them the Father's words - **John 17:8** - **“For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.”**

Then these apostles carried **those same words** to those who would listen - **John 17:20** - **“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word....”** And the end result of this process is people who believe these words are, once again, **“in”** the Father and the Son - **John 17:21** - **“....that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us....”**

Please don't think of this as just some mental exercise this Sunday morning. It **means** something very relevant to you. Follow these ideas all the way home. It means **to this very day** there is no preaching or teaching of any kind in any church in any corner of this planet that can produce saving faith other than that which is a **reproduction of the Apostles recorded words**. Anything else is a waste of time with eternal consequences. Any other message is the most **unloving act a church can perform**.

It is easy to see the early church got the message. Certainly it hasn't always been the case, but right out of the gate this mandate from Jesus was the heartbeat of the church's earliest days - **Acts 2:42** - **“ And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”**

2) **WHAT IS THE GLORY JESUS GIVES HIS FOLLOWERS AND HOW DOES IT UNITE THEM SO DEEPLY?**

John 17:22-23 - **“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.”**

Jesus doesn't specifically **state** the nature of this glory in clear terms. But you can see what it is from the surrounding context. Especially in **verse 24** Jesus defines this glory in terms of His own relationship with the

Father - **“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.*”**

Jesus defines the glory He had as the ***eternal love of Father God***. It was glorious that Jesus enjoyed such love and unity with Father God. And it is the essence of the glory Jesus gives to His followers that ***they*** can be loved by God, though sinners, without any diminishing of God’s justice and holiness.

This glory comes to those who saw and cherished the unique redemptive mission on which the Son was ***sent*** by the Father. This is why Jesus ties the giving of this glory to believing He was sent into this world by Father God - **John 17:21-22** - **“....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....”***

So the glory is being brought into the love of Father God ***through*** the work of the ***sent Son***. That the perfect Son should be loved by a righteous heavenly Father isn’t shocking. But that you and I can ***share*** in that divine love is truly ***glorious*** indeed!

So that’s what this glory given by Christ ***is***. Now on to the second question - ***How*** does it unite us so deeply?

The striking point here is the church is united ***not*** by concentrating on ***unity*** directly, but by concentrating on ***Christ*** completely. In other words this isn’t an ***organizational*** unity. And it isn’t the same thing as ***unanimity***, which is everyone being just like everyone else.

The ***oneness*** Jesus describes and prays for is a ***spiritual*** unity. By that I mean it isn’t ***man-made***. You can’t motivate people into this. You can’t get it from Oprah. It is ***Spirit***-formed. It is the natural result of the Holy Spirit ***removing the selfish elements from our natures that keep us apart and divide our deepest interests***. It is the unity that unites people who all treasure Christ more than anything else. With all our different gifts and personalities, our hearts are moving in the same direction to the same reason for existence.

This is a unity of ***divine loving divine***. It is the Spirit of Christ reigning in me adoring the Spirit of Christ reigning in you. It is the character of Jesus in me ***forgiving*** what is still being redeemed in you - just as I have already been graciously forgiven by that same indwelling Christ.

3) **UNITY IN CHRIST GIVES OUR GOSPEL WORDS CREDENCE AND MAKES THE CHURCH’S MESSAGE MAGNETIC**

I said earlier I’d return to an important phrase at the end of **verse 21**. Now is the best time to do that and see the same phrase repeated in **verse 23**:

John 17:21-23 - **“....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.*”***

We already know from John’s gospel that not ***everyone*** is going to believe. But some will. And Jesus tells us the church’s deep love for Christ, manifesting itself in a grace-filled, patient, sacrificial love for each other, will have a powerful drawing effect on many onlookers.

We can ***see*** the outworking of Jesus’ words in **Acts 2:44-47** - **“And all who believed were together and had all things in common. [45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. [46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”**

Even a world blind to the truth of Jesus knows the inward reality of its own selfish heart. The darkest sinner knows the power of his own inward corruption. And the darkest heart can see the outward fruit of a heart set free of self-centeredness. There is a powerful pull toward the light in the flaming example of a Christ-filled heart. That example alone won’t ***save*** anyone. But it can soften a dark soul to the ***words of the gospel***. This is Jesus’ point.

But notice one more idea here. There are two references to the on-looking world in Jesus' prayer. They're

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close to the same, but not quite - **John 17:21 & 23** - "...so that the world may **believe** that you have sent me....[23]....so that the world may **know** that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."

The second reference is **broader** than the first. **Some** will come to believe. **All** will know they were loved by Father God, even those who ultimately reject saving grace. The first reference includes those who repent and believe. The second includes even those who reject and rebel. Some will acknowledge Christ gladly, receiving His glory in this life. Others will reject the light they had. They will be among the throng that will be forced to bow and confess that Jesus Christ was Lord of all.

4) O, how our Lord prayed you would be in that first group. Believe the truth of Christ today!
WHERE IS ALL OF HISTORY GOING?

John 17:24-26 - "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."

There are two precious thoughts here. I start with the **second** and then move back to the **first**. **Jesus makes it clear He will continue to make His name known to us** - **John 17:26** - "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."

Our Lord will continue to **press His influence and presence** into our hearts. There is no prospect of **diminishment**. He didn't pray and then just say "good-bye" to His church. We aren't left groping for any shred of divine help we can find. Jesus remembers His **pledge**. We have His **word**. He is our **continuing** Lord. He is persistently faithful. We don't live in the dark. He continually **makes Himself known**.

The second truth relates to the first. **How long** will Jesus continue to make His name known? Where is this going?

John 17:24 - "...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.**"

Jesus will subdue all things unto Himself. There is no other ending possible. And the glory will be brighter and deeper than anything we have known so far.