

# Session 5

**March 29, 2020**

**Unit 1: Jesus Is . . .**

## **The Loving Pray-er**

Jesus' prayer reveals both His deepest desires for us and how we should care for others.

### **The Word**

John 17:1-21

## **Engage the Word**

Final words are among the most significant words we speak. This is especially true when the speaker knows they are final words. Whether the speaker is moving away or nearing death, those final words attempt to pack all the love, all the hope, and all the desires one has for those to whom one speaks. John 13:31—17:26 contain Jesus' final words of love and teaching to His disciples. This "Farewell Discourse" culminates in a prayer found in John 17. In this prayer, Jesus packed all the love, hope, and desires He had for His disciples.

### **A Prayer of Praise that Glorifies God** **John 17:1-5**

The most important truth about prayer is that it is directed toward God. The first subject of all prayer should be God, not our wants or needs. Jesus modeled that in His prayer for the disciples by first focusing on God and the glory God deserves. The mutual love and mission of Jesus and the Heavenly Father are clear in the opening verses of this prayer. The work of God had become the work of Jesus. So it is right that the Father would bring glory to Jesus as Jesus gave glory to the Father.

The work God had assigned Jesus was to bring eternal life to all who would come to know the Father and the Son. Though we often think of eternal life as life without end, that is a by-product of the real meaning. Eternal life is the life that is shared with us by the Eternal One. Eternal life is the life of the kingdom of God in which all reality is defined by God rather than by the things of this earth. The outcome of such eternal life is deep and abiding relationship with God the Father and God the Son.

## **A Prayer of Protection for Unity and Joy**

### **John 17:6-13**

The second focus of Jesus' prayer is on His followers. Though it will be quite clear in the next chapter of John that those followers were not perfect, Jesus presents them to God as having received His words and believed that He (Jesus) had been sent by God. Jesus was able both to rejoice at the spiritual progress made by His followers and to rebuke them when their focus slipped from God and God's mission to their own agendas. This is a sign of authentic love.

Because He knew these were final words, Jesus prayed for protection for His followers. However, His prayer takes a different note from most of our prayers for protection. His prayer was that God protect His followers from abandoning the faith. He prayed for the unity and joy of His followers, knowing that their oneness with each other would strengthen them to remain faithful in the face of opposition to them and their faith. Likewise, a shared joy strengthens God's people for faithfulness to God's mission.

## **A Prayer of Preparation for Fulfilling God's Mission**

### **John 17:14-21**

Jesus then tightened the focus on the faithfulness of His followers after He was gone. He recognized that they would have to live out that faithful commitment in a world that rejects such devotion. His prayer was not just that His followers survive in the world, but that they take up the mission of God for which Jesus had been sent as their purpose for living.

This kind of commitment to the mission of God requires transformation from our natural desires and motivations. For this reason, Jesus prayed that God would sanctify His followers. The setting apart of followers of Christ to the mission of God is not something we can do for ourselves. It requires the gracious action of God infusing truth and faithfulness into our very hearts. The result will be a union of Christ and His followers in holiness and mission. God had done a similar work of sanctifying when He sent Jesus into the world.

The missional focus of the prayer becomes clear in verse 20 when Jesus prays for all those who will believe in the future. This vast host of people, including us, become part of the people of God because of the faithfulness of Jesus' original followers to the mission He entrusted to them. The prayer climaxes with a vision of a mission equally shared by God the Father, Christ the Son, and all the followers of Christ.

Jesus' final prayer for His followers models for us a pattern of prayer in which we focus on God and His glory, then on the spiritual health of the church, and finally on the mission God gave us for the world that is yet to believe. His prayer calls us to lay aside our personal agendas and desires to unite with each other and with God in restoring all creation to God's creation purposes. Though the first disciples did not know John 17 was Jesus' final prayer for them, we do. This places greater responsibility on us to live in union with each other and with Christ.

## **Did You Know?**

John 17 is often called Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer" for His followers. That title was not commonly used for the prayer until the 16th century, but it perfectly captures the loving and intercessory nature of the prayer.

## **Think About It**

Jesus' final prayer greatly emphasizes the unity of His followers. Given the developments of church history and the often fractured nature of the church today, how can we live in a way that answers Jesus' prayer for unity?

## **Reflect**

Read Jesus' prayer in John 17:1-21 several times this week. As you do, allow time for reflection on the message of this prayer.

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