

~Script, Pastor Frank R. Johnson~

If I Could Pray for You Like Jesus “What Jesus Prayed for Us” (John 17:20-26)

Take a first look.

I. SOMETIMES THE SOLUTION of things is not as complicated as we think.

Sherman Buford of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama shares, “Mensa is an organization whose members have an IQ of 140 or higher. A few years ago, there was a Mensa convention in San Francisco, and several members lunched at a local café. While dining, they discovered that their **saltshaker contained pepper and their pepper shaker was full of salt**. How could they swap the contents of the bottles without spilling, and using only the implements at hand? Clearly this was a job for Mensa! The group debated and presented ideas, and finally came up with a brilliant solution involving a napkin, a straw, and an empty saucer. They called the waitress over to dazzle her with their solution.

“‘Ma’am,’ they said, ‘we couldn’t help but notice that the pepper shaker contains salt and the saltshaker—’

“‘Oh,’ the waitress interrupted. ‘Sorry about that.’ She unscrewed the caps of both bottles and switched them.”¹

I wish he would have recounted the looks on those intelligent folks’ faces at that simple solution!

II. FOR THE PAST forty+ years, I have read books and magazines that describe what other churches have done that they claim have caused them to grow into kingdom-shaped churches. I have read about seeker-friendly approaches, authentic group-processes, dynamic services of worship, events that attract people, and a purpose-driven mentality. I might add, even though I am keenly aware of the responsibility before the Lord of the Lead Pastor regarding the local church, I have gotten rather tired of hearing the phrase, “The pastor is the key.” Sometimes a pastor can feel like a lost key that doesn’t fit any lock that he has tried!

In my old age, I have come to be suspicious of the heart of the matter. In all our clambering after the latest tools for doing ministry in this generation, we must never forget what Jesus Himself both gave us and with which He has called us.

It could be that whether we are in suburban Los Angeles or in rural Washington state, God is just waiting to be recognized as God, waiting for us to come before Him in earnestness and simplicity to seek Him, waiting for us to ask and to keep asking Him to do what only He can do. *Perhaps the missing link in the transfer of methods from one place to another is simply the corporate life of prayer.* It might be just that profoundly basic.

III. PRAYER, REMEMBER, IS simply the ongoing two-way conversation between the Creator of everything else outside of Himself and the people He has made to share His image. It is a conversation demanding both *speaking* (what we usually think of as prayer) and *listening* (the sometimes forgotten other side of the conversation). We learn to listen as we soak our minds in what God has revealed through the Scriptures and supremely through Jesus Christ. We hear His voice as the Holy Spirit applies that history, poetry, prophecy, gospel and correspondence to our lives personally and corporately.

¹ *MSN.com* (7-23-02); submitted by Sherman Lee Buford, Tuskegee Institute, Alabama, to *PreachingToday.com*.

And nowhere can we learn better both how to approach this conversation than from our Lord Jesus Himself. His example is supreme in everything. We have been meditating on His High-Priestly prayer for several weeks to sit at His feet and learn from Him. Today, we will learn what Jesus prayed for us (yes, for us!). This should give us great direction as we seek to manifest the kingship of God in Christ in our generation and location (or in any generation and location, for that matter). Here is the heart of what He desires for us. Let's listen in as He made this request originally just before His arrest and crucifixion.

Take a closer look at John 17:20-26.

I. JESUS ASKED THAT WE WOULD BE ONE, JUST AS HE AND THE FATHER ARE ONE. Vv. 20-23

1. *This prayer was offered on behalf of “the ones who believe because of the word” of the first believers.* This is why we have been so bold as to take personally and presently what Jesus already asked for His disciples. The presumption of Jesus was that His disciples would take seriously the Great Commission, that they would indeed “make disciples of all nations” (all *ethne*, all ethnic groups) by going, baptizing, and teaching (see Matthew 28:18-20). He presumed, rightly, that those disciples would make other disciples, and that this transfer of faith and following Jesus would carry right on down the years until He returned to call it all to a conclusion.

But He prayed for us with a specific purpose in mind, “that all may be one.”

2. *The unity He desired was a supreme unity, united together in union with the Father and the Son.* He prayed that we would be “one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, in order that they themselves may be in us....” Pause with me to let that thought sink in. He did not ask for tolerance between Christians in the local church, toward other churches in the same denomination, nor even toward churches that are of a different brand. He did not ask that we have friendly *feelings* toward other Christians or churches. He did not ask that we hold an occasional service of worship or service project together with others who professed faith in Jesus Christ. *He asked that we be one.* And if that wasn't enough, he gave us the standard of that oneness: the same kind that exists between the Father and the Son in the Trinity. Has this prayer been answered yet? Only at times and places where complete devotion to Christ has been known by a group, however large or small. Will it be answered completely some day? Yes! It will come to pass in the Resurrection among those who gaze at the face of our Lord Jesus Christ directly and together.

3. *This unity would be based on the glory which Jesus received from the Father and gave to His followers.* Verse 22 continues this thought and gives a bit more insight as to how this unity can be reached. Jesus received the glory of the Father and passed it on to His disciples. The very glory of Jesus Christ which rests on His true followers is the means to our unity in Him. It is not a glory that comes naturally to us. It is a glory that comes as we abide in Him together and allow Him the freedom to reshape our character until Christ Himself shines in our hearts and on our faces and His glory reaches out and touches others who belong to Christ.

Insight: We must not settle for less than the complete unity between true Christians that Jesus requested from the Father.

I—Some time back I began thinking about such things as time use and have reevaluated my entire life and schedule. That reevaluation has brought me where I am at this very moment. At certain points of that reevaluation, I wondered if it was wise for me to continue to take part in such things as the Kittitas Valley Ministerial Association or to attend meetings of the Central Washington Baptist Association or to take the extra time about three times a year to participate on the Executive Board of the Northwest Baptist Convention (I am no longer on that board). I wondered if I should have served on the board of the Care Net Pregnancy Center (Now “Sparrow”) of Kittitas County. Should I have agreed to serve for eight years on the board of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission for the SBC? Each of these matters of cooperation required time attending meetings and doing other tasks related to involvement. That in turn took away from time I might have spent doing something else directly related to my role in the local church. For many years now, I have coordinated the writers for our local newspaper’s Saturday column “Messages of Faith.” This has involved writing email messages, making phone calls, tackling people in public—you get the point. Was/is it worth it?

But then I began to read this prayer of Jesus Christ more carefully and to consider the implications of what Jesus asked. Can I do any less than participate in these various expressions of Christian unity and still be faithful to Christ? Am I being truly devoted to Jesus as His follower if I am making no effort to build relationships with other believers, however separated they may be from me geographically, historically, or even to some degree theologically—if they are true followers of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament? If I am not making some serious and consistent effort of this kind to reach out to my brothers and sisters in Christ, I must now say, “No, I am not being faithful to the calling of Christ.” To be faithful to Christ means to be faithful to the people called by His name. If I am separating myself from them at any level, I am to that extent disobedient to His calling and an impediment to His mission in the world.

If we are going to pray like Jesus prayed, then we must come to value what Jesus values. He values unity so greatly that He wants it to be analogous to the unity between the Father and the Son in the Trinity.

II. JESUS ASKED THAT OUR UNITY WOULD CONVINCE THE WORLD OF THE TRUTH ABOUT HIM. Vv. 21b, 23

1. *The effect of this unity would be that the world would believe that the Father sent the Son.* This is the result and the purpose of the unity that Jesus desires for His followers. Note the end of verse 21, “in order that the world may *believe* that You sent Me.” What would make the world believe that Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God? *Unity among His followers.* We could ask this question in reverse, couldn’t we? Why does the world not believe that the Father sent the Son? Could it be because of *the lack of unity among His followers*?

2. *This goes further than mere belief. Where true unity among the followers of Jesus is evident, the world will know that the Father sent the Son and that the Father loved the Son and the Son loved His followers.* What would both help the world believe the Gospel’s claim that Jesus is the Son of God, and what would make the world know this to be true? *Unity among the followers of Jesus Christ.*

Insight: If Christian unity is this important to Jesus Christ, it should be this important to Christians in every generation. The world awaits such a profound unity of truth and of love. Without a visible expression of the unity in the Body of Christ, the world remains skeptical of the claims of Christ, and such skepticism ends in hell.

I—When Christ is at the center, when those seeking to know Him in His fullness press inward, they will be brought together. Here is an analogy to that work. This story dates to the early 2000s, before the Islamic terrorist group known as Hamas launched an unprovoked attack against Israel on October 7, 2023, that left over 1,200 civilians dead. Here is the report as I read it:

A Palestinian baby found abandoned at birth in a roadside heap of trash was rescued by Palestinian doctors, nurtured by a group of nuns, and had her heart repaired by an Israeli surgeon. [This seems inconceivable two decades later.]

The survival of tiny Salaam, whose name means “peace” in Arabic, has become a rare example of the region’s usually fractured and clashing peoples working together to save a life.

The area has been torn by Palestinian–Israeli violence in which children and infants on both sides have suffered and died.

Salaam was found by Palestinians along a road north of the West Bank town of Ramallah and taken to a shelter run by Palestinian social services. A group of nuns in Bethlehem gave her a permanent home.

But the baby’s health worsened. She was born with a large hole between the chambers of her heart, and her lungs were not receiving enough blood. Palestinian doctors noticed she was turning blue and losing weight, and the baby was taken to a Jerusalem hospital.

“She was skin and bone and that’s it,” said Israeli doctor Eli Milgalter, who operated on Salaam’s heart on January 24 [of 2002]. The nuns raised nearly \$11,000 to pay for the hospital costs, and Milgalter performed the surgery without accepting payment. Salaam has made a full recovery, doctors said.²

Can you believe it? A baby discarded into the trash beside the road in Gaza is found by Palestinian doctors. Money is raised for the baby’s medical care by a group of Catholic sisters. The surgery on the baby’s heart is done by an Israeli surgeon who won’t take the money. They call the baby Salaam, “peace.”

Did you catch the analogy? The Prince of Peace was born in a stable in a village in Israel. The announcement of His birth was made to a group of culturally distant shepherds on a hillside outside of town, not to the king in the palace nor to the high priest in the temple. The word was, “This is good news of great joy that shall be *for all the people*” (Luke 2:10). Jesus was God’s Peace Child, sent to bring to people what could not have been theirs without His intervention. We are closest to each other when we are kneeling together in worship around the manger—or before the cross.

III. JESUS PRAYED THAT WE WOULD BE WHERE HE IS AND SEE HIS GLORY. V. 24

1. “Heaven” is defined here as being with Jesus where He is. As we have noted before, in our study of Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians, we Christians don’t always agree on the details about the End Time or about how we should describe heaven. But here, Jesus gives us the essence of our hope: “To be with Jesus where He is.” That is heaven!

2. Heaven is also defined here as seeing, in that perfect and lasting vision, the glory of our Savior. This is the vision that will transform forever those who have it. Jesus asked that this vision be fulfilled in the lives of His followers. We catch a glimpse of His glory when we receive Him into our lives at the first aspect of salvation. That glimpse will yield to a complete vision when we are taken to be with Him forever.

² “‘Peace Baby’ Touches Mideast Enemies,” Associated Press (2-25-02); submitted by James C. Lindberg, Tempe, Arizona, to *PreachingToday.com*.

Insight: The hope of our salvation must sustain us and motivate us, because it will surely be fulfilled in answer to Jesus' prayer.

I—Perhaps you heard on the radio or on a television program a couple of decades ago an interview with Dayna Curry and Heather Mercer? These two women were imprisoned by the Taliban in Afghanistan and were then liberated when American special forces marched into the city where they were being held. These two middle-class American women do not consider themselves to be heroes. I heard a part of an interview with them on Family Life Today, a radio ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ. Dayna, I believe it was, the more verbal of the two, was saying how she really had no heroism in her at all. She felt great fear in her heart through the whole ordeal, but rather than allow that to paralyze her, she just kept praying.

The two women had gone to Afghanistan with a Christian relief organization to attempt to relieve the suffering of the poorest of the poor among the citizens of Afghanistan. The Taliban had arrested them because they had been suspected of telling people about Jesus Christ, which was strictly forbidden by this radical Islamic regime. During their period of arrest and trial, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, occurred. These two women then became pawns on the International chess table. People all across the world began to pray for them, for their protection, their witness and their release. In November of 2001, those prayers were answered. After being carted here and there by the Taliban forces, often sleeping in a different place each night, they came to a city that was invaded by the American special forces while they were there. Rather than killing them, as they had almost come to expect, they were unexpectedly abandoned and then discovered by the ones who liberated the city.

They have written a book telling their story, and they have dedicated the proceeds from the book's sale to establish a ministry of their own, "Hope Afghanistan." Their book is entitled *Prisoners of Hope*. Here are two women who are so heavenly minded that they are changing the face of the world for the good! And it is all because of our shared hope in Christ.

Jesus prayed that this hope would sustain us and motivate us to make a difference in the world in every way possible.

IV. JESUS PRAYED THAT WE WOULD KNOW THE FULLNESS OF HIS LOVE FOR US. Vv. 25-26

1. *Jesus revealed the "name" of the Father so that those who believed in Him would have the love of the Father in them.* His name represented His character. And Jesus came "full of grace and truth" (see John 1:14). These two attributes bring together many others of the character of God. His grace is a direct expression of His self-giving love.

2. *This love is revealed and empowered by the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ in His people by the Holy Spirit.* Jesus prayed that Jesus Himself may be in His people and that the love which the Father has for the Son may be in the followers of Jesus Christ.

Insight: To understand the coming of Jesus Christ is to understand the love of the Father both for the Son and for those He came to save. When we have understood this, we are compelled by the Holy Spirit to allow this fruit of love to grow within us.

I—This love can be given specific dimension in response to the brokenness of the world around us. Charles Lyons, at one time pastor of Armitage Baptist Church in Chicago, Illinois, writes:

People still get killed in my neighborhood. A 13-year-old kid gets gunned down at night, and the cops show up to clean up the mess and ask a few questions, but nobody knows anything. Nobody gets arrested. It creates a lonely, helpless, and hopeless atmosphere to live in. People think, *Nobody cares, and nothing will change*.

The night the Chicago Bulls won the NBA championship in 1993, a young kid—I think his name was Julio—was caught up in the crowd leaving the arena. The Imperial Gangsters were out that night, making sure no rival gangs were blending in the crowd to cross their turf. I don't know if Julio was wearing the wrong colors or what, but somewhere in the midst of those sports fans, the Imperial Gangsters dragged him down and stabbed him to death. Nobody saw a thing.

The following Wednesday, I announced we were going on a prayer march. The church responded to the tragedy and even offered a reward for information leading to Julio's killers.

It wasn't the first time, or the last, that we got involved with a young man's slaying. When a kid gets shot in our neighborhood, we hold a prayer service on the exact spot where the kid died. We've had as many as 350 people show up for one of these.

We walk up and down the street, letting people know they're not alone and forgotten. We ask if there's anything we can pray with them about.

After getting in touch with the neighborhood, we hold a brief prayer vigil. The people are there—around the corner, in the alley, up in their windows—listening. We sing a few songs, offer a few pointed prayers for parents, the police, the gang members. Someone stands up in the back of a pickup truck and shares a five-minute gospel presentation. Then we wrap it up and go on.³

Take it home (applications).

I. MAY GOD allow us to learn to pray and to love like that!

II. MAY GOD fill us with the Christian hope to such an extent that we feel indestructible in the face of the world, the flesh, and the devil (which we *are* until our purpose before God is completed).

III. MAY WE learn to love each other and our God to such a degree that the world believes that the Creator has come in the person of Jesus Christ and that He loves us with an everlasting love!

³ Charles Lyons, "The Prayer Hood," *Leadership* (Fall 2001), p. 68.