

## **4-2-23 Palm Sunday**

### **Sermon- Jesus' Prayer at the Last Supper**

**Scripture-John 17:1-26, CTW Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29**

**Hymns: Pk and Ileana to choose**

Theme: This prayer, given by Jesus on the night of His Triumphant ride, later while at the Last Supper, is possibly the greatest prayer of all time because it shows Jesus' heart and true desire for His people...that they be unified. Palm Sunday was the pinnacle of unification of His people in His favor...days later, it was the pinnacle of His people unified against Him. Both facts should be present in our prayers.

#### **I. Introduction: Setting the Scene**

The moment of Jesus arrest, trial and execution is fast approaching. Jesus has finished his teaching of the disciples. The hour has come. His work on earth is complete. So complete in fact that he can say with confidence at the end of ch16: "33Take courage; I have conquered the world!" And then he turns to prayer.

**A. Notice that John chooses to bring us a report of this prayer, given at the Last Supper on the way to Gethsemane, rather than the prayer of anguish in the garden that we find in the other gospels.**

Why does he do that? Well, it may be that this prayer acts in some way as a summary of all that's gone before in this gospel.

Here we find Jesus' obedience to the Father; the glorification of his father through his death and resurrection; the revelation of God in Jesus Christ; the choosing of the disciples out of the world; their unity modelled on the unity of the Father and the Son; and the promise that their final destiny is to share in the glory of the Father and the Son in eternity.

It's as though this is the final crescendo, the final movement in a gospel that shows us Christ dwelling among us as one of us but returning to God and taking us with him, a crescendo that climaxes in chapters 18-20 with the passion and triumph of Jesus the Messiah.

**B. Jesus can say with confidence that he has overcome the world, yet he turns in the next breath to prayer, to ask God to bring him the victory.** In fact the prayer he prays is divided into three parts. First he prays for himself, then he prays for the disciples, then he prays for all those who will come to believe in him through their testimony. **It's for Us!**

As we go through this prayer notice two things. First of all, notice how Jesus' priorities are reflected in the things he prays for. You may have found this true for you. When you find yourself under stress, do you find yourself concentrating on are the things that really matter? So it is with Jesus as he prays, knowing that the end is near.

But notice also how the way Jesus prays can be a model for us in our prayer life. We'll see in a moment how he prays for himself, then how he prays for those he's been ministering to, and finally, how he has a long term view in mind as well as he prays.

## **II. Jesus Prays for Himself**

Jesus has just finished saying that he's overcome the world, and now he stops to pray.

**A. The first thing he prays is that God would glorify him.** Now at first sight this sounds like a fairly self-serving prayer. But to understand what he's asking we need to think about what's involved in Jesus being glorified.

In fact he's already talked about being glorified back in **John 12**. You may remember how when some Greeks came to see him, Jesus recognized it as a sign that the end had come. So he said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24Very

truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." **John 12:23-24 NRSV**

Then he says "'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say -- 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. 28Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.'" **John 12:27-28 NRSV**

Jesus glorification will first involve his death on the cross, with all its agony and shame. Jesus is to be hung on a cross, as a sign that he's cursed by God.

As **Philippians 2:6-8** puts it, "though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, 8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross."

Jesus asks God to glorify him, because only God is able to do it. Jesus has given up everything that might have enabled him to do it himself, and now is turning to God, to restore to him that which is rightly his.

**B. Jesus is also asking God to vindicate him, to show that his claims are true.** He says God has given him authority to give eternal life to all whom God has given him, but before that can happen, he needs to be shown to be righteous. He needs to be restored to the glory he had before the world began.

Even as he's asking for God to glorify him, notice that his mind is on God's plan to bring salvation to those God has given him. His request for glory is simply to fulfil God's eternal plan to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, Jesus Christ **Ephesians 1:10.**

What's more, as he asks, his greatest reason for asking is so that he might glorify the Father. This is the thing that characterizes all of his ministry on earth. **He has come to glorify the Father.**

Is this what our prayers are like when we pray for ourselves or for our church? When you pray for yourself, are you asking God to bring about his own glory through the things you do? Are you placing yourself in God's plan for the world, so that the things God does through you will bring forward his plan of salvation for the whole world?

I'm afraid that too often I find myself praying that sort of prayer with motives that are very mixed. **Seeking my own glory or my own ends, for my own sake,** rather than for the sake of God and his glory.

### **III. Jesus Prays for his Disciples**

But Jesus' prayer doesn't end with his own glorification.

**A. Jesus' thoughts then move on naturally to those that the Father has given him.** There's a close bond between the disciples and Jesus that comes out very clearly, in verse 6 and that forms the grounds for his prayer: "Father, I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word."

He sees the disciples as his special charges, as though God has entrusted them to him, like a foster parent might be given the responsibility of raising someone else's children. And he says, "I've fulfilled your charge to me. I've made you known to them. They've believed my word.

They now know that what I have comes from you." Notice how he repeats those words: 'Now they know' (v7); 'they know in truth' (v8); 'They have received them' (v8); 'they have believed' (v8).

**There's a special relationship between them, based on the way they've received God's words.**

So he prays for them, for those that the Father has given him, because they also belong to the Father. And what does he pray?  
**Verse 11: "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me."**

**B. He first prays for the Father's protection.** Back in John chapter 14 he promised that he wouldn't leave them as orphans. One of the dangers for orphans in that sort of society was that they were defenseless.

They had no-one to protect them from people who would seek to do them harm. So now he prays that God the Father would take over the role of protecting them from the dangers of living in this world.

**And notice what it is that they need to be protected from.** He says "protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, **as we are one.**"

Jesus has already given them his new commandment, to love one another. In fact he's said it three times in the last few chapters. And one reason he gave that command was that only by loving one another could we maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace **Ephesians 4:3.**

The great danger for the disciples, and for the church of the future, is that they'll be broken apart by division. I think that's why Jesus has to say it three times: because it's such a danger. And it's not just a danger for the Church. It's actually a threat to the glory of God.

Look at **verse 10.** He says "I have been glorified in them." And down in **verses 22 and 23:** "The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, 23 in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

**C. Their unity with each other and with Jesus is a sign to the world that Jesus was indeed sent by the Father and that they are loved by the Father.** So our unity as a Church in itself brings glory to God.

What's more, their unity is necessary if none of them are to fall away. Up to this time Jesus has kept them together, but now that he's about to leave them, they need the Father's help to stay together, so they can support one another.

They also need the Father's protection against the attacks of the evil one (**verse15**). Jesus is in no doubt that any opposition they face will come from Satan. While he talks about the world being opposed to them, it's quite clear that behind that world is the Prince of this world.

As **Ephesians 6** tells us, "our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (**Ephesians 6:12 NRSV**) And while we live in this world we'll continue to fight against the forces of evil in the world that are opposed to the gospel.

This is the reality of our situation isn't it? We live in a culture, in a world, that's opposed to God and therefore will be opposed to us whenever we stand up for the principles that God has given us. That's what we see in the world, and we can't escape it. This is the only world we have to live in. So what are we going to do?

**D. The next part of his prayer tells us. Jesus prays that God will protect them from the evil one.** In **verse15**, then he prays that God will sanctify them by the truth. What does that mean?

To sanctify means to set apart, to separate. How are we going to keep ourselves safe from the world? Not by being taken out of it physically, but by being separated from it spiritually. And how will

that happen? Jesus says "sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."

This fits with what he said back in **verse 6**. It's by God's word that we're sanctified. It's as we believe God's word and let it take control of our lives, that we find ourselves set apart from the attitudes and values of the world around us.

Let me ask you, how often do you study God's word? Are you regularly allowing God's word into your mind and heart so it can sanctify you, make you different, protect you from the attacks of the world?

Christians who fail to read God's word regularly are in great danger from the world, from the evil one, because the truth of God's word isn't being allowed to do its work in their lives.

So again we see a pattern of prayer, this time for the disciples. And what he prays for is for their protection and preservation, for their unity and for their sanctification by the truth of God's word.

#### **IV. Jesus Prays for Those who will Believe**

**A. Finally, Jesus prays with a longer term focus.** He prays for all those who will come to believe in him through the preaching of the gospel. And again notice that the focus of his prayer is on the **unity of the Church** and the glory that unity brings to Jesus and to the Father. Look at **verse 23**: "I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

**How important it is that we're seen to be completely one!** It's as the world sees our unity, as unbelievers observe the way we interact, the way we care for each other, the way we support one another, that they begin to realize that there must be some truth to the claims of the gospel.

That's why it's so important when we have some problem with another Christian that we seek to resolve it, rather than letting it simmer and fester until it becomes a source of division in the church.

**B. And what is the secret to this sort of unity?** It's in verse 26: "Father, I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

If we're going to pray for our church or for other churches this would be a good thing to include in every one of those prayers: that the love with which the Father has loved Jesus Christ, his only Son, may be in us, and that Jesus himself might be in us.

**V. Conclusion: Perhaps we could make this our aim in the coming weeks.** Let's resolve to go through our church directory each day, maybe a page at a time, praying that God would protect each person by the power of his name, that he would sanctify them in the truth of his word and that he would fill them with the love that the Father has for the Son so we'd be completely one just as the Father and the Son are one. Would you do that with me?

**A. And then pray that God would bring glory to our work as we bring glory to him by the way we live, the way we proclaim his name, the way we seek to live together in unity and godly love.** And finally pray that others would see how we live and want to become followers with us of Jesus Christ.

**That way Jesus' prayer becomes a living thing,** a prayer that continues to be prayed and to do its work as the church grows. I do believe that is the underlying responsibility taught to us by the events both before and after Palm Sunday, don't you?

Amen, Let us pray...