

Series: Messianic Fulfillment

THE YEAR OF THE BIBLE

Sermon #9: Passion Week – Pray Like the High Priest John 17:1-25

Dr. Matt Cassidy --- October 25, 2020

Good morning, Grace! Thanks for attending and thanks for seeing us online. I hope you caught all that was happening on the weekend of the thirty-first. We have the Halloween thing on that Saturday. And then Sunday we're going to have Easter again because we'll be in that passage in the Bible, and we're going to celebrate Easter right with people here. There's Daylight Savings Time in between those things. After the "Easter Again" service we're going to have pizza under the trees, but it's going to be more like kolaches under the trees because it will be early. And then we'll also be giving out boxes for our Operation Christmas Child program, because we're going to get in all the holidays of the whole year in there because Jesus is coming back on Monday ... so vote early. All right ... that's how we're planning this. Can't wait!

Let me tell you what we're going to do today. We're going to look at a passage of Scripture today and we're going to have communion and then I'm going to come back and I just want to say a few things again, in light of where we are and where our culture is. So, hang in there. Stay here and then stay there until we finally are done. And we'll do all this in another thirty-six minutes.

We're studying through the Bible here at Grace—2020 is the year of the Bible. And as we're reading through, we're finding what God's big picture of redemption looks like, how He's going to make things well. He's going to redeem the lost, and He's going to fix the things that only He can fix. That's the story of redemption. As we're working our way through that, we have found ourselves in the last days of the ministry of Jesus Christ. Last week we looked at Passion Week.

Jesus' Conversation and Prayer in the Upper Room

Today we're going to look at—if you have a red-letter Bible, the words of Jesus are in red—we're in what's called the Upper Room conversation or teaching, or Upper Room discourse. It is chapters 14, 15, and 16. It's all red.

And after that teaching time is chapter 17, the prayer. Jesus prays. He prays what's called the High Priestly Prayer. And it is a magnificent prayer. The whole chapter, all of chapter 17, is this prayer.

It is the greatest prayer ever prayed on earth and the greatest prayer recorded anywhere in Scripture. John 17 is certainly the “holy of holies” of the Gospel record, and we must approach this chapter in a spirit of humility and worship.

--Warren Wiersbe

Here's what one scholar said: “It is the greatest prayer prayed on earth and the greatest prayer recorded anywhere in Scripture. John 17 is certainly the ‘holy of holies’ of the Gospel record, and we must approach this chapter in a spirit of humility and worship.” Amen.

Not only is this a beautiful prayer prayed by Jesus the Christ; it is a great prayer for us to pray. Become like Christ in all of life? Pray like Christ in His prayer life. And so, I want you to see this as a template for the way you and I could be praying for ourselves and for each other.

If you turn to chapter 17 in the Book of John, you're going to see a simple outline. Almost every Bible that's out there is going to have this outline. Here's the outline: Jesus prays for Himself, He prays for the eleven, and then He prays for the Church. Himself, the eleven, and then His Church.

I. Jesus Prays for Himself

John 17:1-4

After Jesus said this, He looked toward heaven and prayed: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may glorify you. ² For you granted Him authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those You have given Him. ³ Now this is eternal life: that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent. ⁴ I have brought You glory on earth by finishing the work You gave me to do.

So, let’s get started. Jesus prays for Himself. It’s verses 1 through 5. We’ll read 1 through 4. “After Jesus said this, He looked toward heaven and He prayed, ‘Father, the hour has come. Now glorify Your Son, that Your Son may glorify You. For You granted Him authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those You have given to Him. Now this is eternal life: that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent. I have brought You glory on earth by finishing the work You gave me to do.’”

The first He prays is that He prays for Himself. Can you pray for yourself? Well, Jesus does. So apparently, yes, the answer is yes. And what Jesus is praying here, generically—if we were to pray this way, we would say, “Lord, anything and everything you send my way, I want that to be used to glorify You. I want that to be used to bring You praise and to bring other people to praise You ... because of whatever You bring me, good or bad.”

And so, in the context of good: it looks like “glorify me” sounds like a good thing. It’s not in this case, but the idea is can you pray that God would give you good things? Sure. And you use your income or your possessions or a place of authority, your success, your individual talent--all these things. *Yes, Lord, bless me, I hope I win this thing so that I can glorify You.* Jesus is constantly pointing to the Father—always pointing to the Father. And we can pray that way too when we use that to point to the Father. Anything and everything that comes our way can be used to glorify God, for good and for bad.

In the context of this prayer, Jesus is saying, *Glorify me so that You might give me mercy and grace, because now I will be betrayed and beaten and I will die an ugly death.*” And so, even

in suffering, Lord, Father, holy Father, let my suffering bring glory to You. Let my suffering show the world Your wisdom, Your power, Your love towards all people. That's what He's praying.

Application

I want to stop right here and say this to this church. I've been here a long time and many of us have gone through a lot of life together. And when I read this passage, I thought, *Oh, this church*. I love the way you guys bring glory to God in your prosperity. I've seen that over the years using those places of influence.

But especially in the suffering. So many of you have had setbacks, sometimes financial and in the context of employment. And you power through the confusion and disappointment. But the physical illnesses that you and your family have had—when you have chosen over the years—I've seen this, I can name names—don't make me name names, we don't have time—but when you choose just not to go with the kind of pop, positive, southern American *Oh, it just means there's something better for you out there*. No, you guys don't do that.

You say, *Look, I'm not going to question God's love in this. God showed and proved His love and His wisdom when He sent His Son, and it looked like He didn't know what He was doing when He sent Him to the cross, and yet it was just this giant trick to set us all free. And if God is that loving to send His only begotten Son so we could have eternal life if we believe Him, I'm not going to negotiate that anymore. And now I will live in a state of confusion, in this kind of suffering. And just having that attitude and bringing those words and speaking them out loud, that glorifies God. That's the answer to that prayer. I serve a loving God and His love and His goodness is not contingent on my circumstances. And so, whatever He sends me, anything and everything, I'm going to use that to deflect and show and just glorify Him. Let other people do that as well. I want to show other people about the love and the wisdom and the power of God.*

Boom, that's how He prays. Jesus prays for Himself that way. We pray for ourselves that way. *Send me anything and everything—I'm going to use it to Your glory.*

II. Jesus Prays for the Eleven

The second thing He does is He prays for the eleven. He's going to do that in verses 6 through 19. It's a big chunk because there's a lot to pray about. In His context, it's those eleven

that followed Him, His most intimate followers. In our context, it's for our friends and our family, the people that God in His sovereignty and the way He's arranged all of life, the people that God brought to our lives. This is how we pray for those.

John 17:9

I am not praying for the world, but for those You have given me ...

Before we look at that prayer itself, I want to make this observation. In this prayer, this high priestly prayer, Jesus does not pray for the world. And it's not like an oversight. It wasn't like He forgot. He doesn't forget. It's on purpose. He says in verse 9, "I am not praying for the world, but for those You have given me."

How come He doesn't pray for the world? Does He not love the world? No, we just sang John 3:16, "For God so loved the world He gave His only Son." So, what's happening? This is Jesus's strategy, it's His hope. This is where Jesus is putting hope and this is the strategy of bringing redemption to the world, redeeming the lost, fixing the things that only God can fix. This is how He works. He's going to pray strategically that the Church would rise up, be strengthened and unified, and they would do God's will. He's praying for a strong Church.

Here's how it could kind of work for us. Don't pray for the cattle. Pray for the ranchers. If the ranchers do their job, the cattle will be just fine. There's probably a better illustration. Don't pray for the team—I'm talking about humans on this one—don't pray for the team, pray for the coaches. If the coaches do their job, the team's going to get stuff done. Don't pray for America. Don't pray for Austin. I mean, you can ... do those things. But strategically, you pray for the Church in Austin, that we would be unified and strengthened and live obediently. Because when the Church is healthy, the Church does the job of redemption. That's the means by which God is bringing redemption into the world. That's what the Holy Spirit is going to be using.

John 17:11, 15-18

**Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your name ...
15 My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that
You protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world,
even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is
truth. 18 As You sent me into the world, I have sent them into the
world.**

So, this is how He prays for His intimate friends. He's going to pray, *God the Father, protect them while they are on mission.* Look what it says, verse 11: "Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your name. My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but rather that You protect them from the evil one while they're in the world. They're not of the world, even as I'm not of it. So, sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world (on mission), I have sent them into the world."

He's saying, *Protect my guys as I send them out on a mission.* He literally says, *Don't take them out—keep them in. Don't isolate them.* He says, *Sanctify them.* Sanctify is a word that's used to mean "to be set apart or made holy," but for a purpose. Not just set apart to be set apart—set apart, made holy, for a purpose. When John used "sanctify," every single time he uses it in his biography of Jesus, he means "on mission"-- sanctified for the purpose of God to do things. So, this we could call a high priestly prayer. But it's also like the high general's prayer for his men. And he's praying, *Listen, Father, look, don't have them run and hide and find some kind of place to kind of ride out the war here.* He's saying, *Father, don't let them be absorbed with the bad guys into the culture and become all but traitors. Don't do that. I want them to stay in the game and I want them to stay fighting. Protect while they're staying in there, fighting.*

A. Falling off the Horse

It is so natural for us to fall off either side of trying to just stay in and be safe, but staying on mission. It's like falling off a horse or something. You can fall off either side of a horse. The hard part is staying on the horse.

1. Assimilation or Imitation

It's so easy for us to be assimilated or imitate our culture. I mean, before there was the Borg (you know the Borg—"You will be assimilated. Resistance is futile") there was the university system of whatever. The culture itself wants to absorb us into it and we take on their values, their world view, their social structures. We take on their cultures and we lose our distinctives. It's very easy to be absorbed. Some people don't just absorb it; they try to imitate the culture. Usually that's not naiveté; that's insecurity. People want to be liked. They don't want to be made fun of for being something, like virtuous, or like a virgin. *Ah, you're one of those.* Or believing in truth or whatever it might be. They just want to fit in. And then when you find yourself assimilated or imitating, the obvious question is "What do you have that I don't have?" And "Why are you any different than me? You're not bringing anything to this conversation."

2. Isolation or Separation

The other way to fall off the horse is to isolate and be separate. Let's just go over there, let's just figure out a way to keep our heads down and not draw any attention to ourselves. Keep this kid safe. Let's get a bunker. Let's ride this baby out.

3. Infiltration

That's not what He's saying here. Jesus is praying this high priestly, military-like prayer. He says, *I want you to infiltrate. I want you to do into the culture, into the community, into the cities, be on mission. I want you to make your impact.* Because of this: you've got to see the big picture of what God's doing. The bigness of God—He brought you here for a very big purpose. You guys live in Austin. You think that's just an accident? No. The big picture is that God brought you here because it is the single most effective place for you to do ministry.

And then you have to see another part of this bigger picture. And the bigger picture is the power of the Holy Spirit living within us, that you don't have to be afraid, that you don't have to go along with other people. You don't have to run and hide, you don't have to be absorbed, because the Spirit of God lives within us.

So, let's get in this thing. You are well equipped to have a successful mission here. God brought you here. God brought every client into your life, every boss that you've ever had.

Whatever the context is, that's this vision of saying, *God, protect him. Father, protect them while they're on mission.*

Don't get absorbed and imitate. Don't isolate yourself. It's sanctified, set apart for a purpose, not just for cultural change, but it is in that practicing of the mission that we grow and become like Christ.

Jeremiah 29:7

Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to Yahweh for the city, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.

Look, this has always been the way. Even in the older Testament when Israel's big call was to be holy and sanctified and everyone would come to them, that didn't work. And so, God, because of their disobedience, spread them out. And even in exile Jeremiah says this to them: "Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to Yahweh for that city that you're living in while you're in exile, because if it prospers, you will prosper too." You too will prosper.

When you get exiled into this other city, exiled into some place—maybe some of you are exiled into Austin. When you get here you don't just find your hive and stay close. No, you're set apart for a mission. You go in there and you infiltrate and you use the power and the talents that you have, the places of influences you have, and you grow. You grow that city. Because if that city grows, if people start getting safe in that city, then you'll be safe. If that city prospers, then you'll be part of the prosperous city.

Listen, this idea of infiltration versus isolation or imitation—friend, it works. If there's no other value that you have ... Does it work? Yes, it works, because it's true, and truth works. This prayer, if it's fulfilled, this is the vibrant Christian life. That's my point. This is the vibrant Christian life. Because it is in the context of "Dear God, protect me while I'm on mission. Don't isolate me. Don't let me be assimilated into this." But it's in the context of trying to do what He's asking us to do that we grow. That's when we become like Christ. If we isolate ourselves, we lose our mission and we get bored. We're just compulsively living for safety. If we imitate, we lose our testimony. We have a purpose, and our purpose is to bring the kingdom of God to

the places that we touch. And if we isolate ourselves, it's almost like ... The purpose of a hammer is to get ugly. If you have a shiny hammer, do you put it away and say, "Oh, I don't want to use it." Then it's not even being a hammer. God sent us on a mission. He prayed for us. He said, "Spirit, protect them while they're sanctified and while they're doing what I've asked them to do."

And here's why it's the vibrant Christian life: because it's how we learn. Like I said, there are two ways to fall off a horse, or two sides to fall off a horse. This has been my experience. Maybe it's not yours. I really want to do this. I want to do crazy stuff for God, and I have found that while I'm doing crazy stuff for God, it is my inclination to sometimes fall off one side of the horse and try to be like everyone else a little too much. And then there are sometimes when I don't want to put up with this anymore and I want to find my two friends, one friend. I want to be by myself and ride this thing out, come Lord Jesus. And see, here's how you become like Christ. You get used to falling off both sides, but you're committed to riding the horse. Get back on the horse. Don't be like them, be light with them. Don't run from them, be light with them. It works. It's the only way it does work. It's God's will and plan for all of us.

I've been involved in student ministry life for nineteen years. Ever since I became a believer I was working with junior high and high school students. After almost twenty years of working with students, here's what I have found: that this little dilemma of isolation or imitation or getting involved with infiltration really shows up in parenting. There's a style of parenting that is like this: *I'm just going to assimilate and imitate the culture. And we're going to have spiritual lives and we'll go to church, especially when it's convenient. But you know, academics and athletics are really important, but we're going to talk about Jesus a lot at the table and those sorts of things.* And frankly, friends, the culture's way too strong for that laissez-faire view of a spiritual soul. And two months after leaving home they are one hundred percent culture. They're gone.

And then the other extreme is over here. All things church, everything church. Education is going to be some kind of a church private education, all of our fun and games. They're not going to know a single person outside of the church in every context of everything they do, whether it's piano or football or whatever. And when they get out, it's like they've never fallen off a horse in their lives. They're eighteen years old and they've never ridden a horse. All they know is this. It's like your parenting model is providing *The Truman Show* experience. And then

they turn eighteen and you say, *Yeah, good luck out there, Truman. They're not going to be all that nice, though, because that's not the way it is.* So, they don't last so long either.

The parenting model is like Jesus in the parent prayer. This is how a parent should pray—they should pray like Jesus prays. *Oh, dear God in heaven, dear Father, while I send my child out there to be in the world, protect them. Sanctify them while they're on mission. I want them to know Your will and fight for that will.* I'd rather my children fall off the horse on one side or the other to get back on and ride the thing than be addicted and stuck on one of the other two. How about you?

That's Jesus' prayer for us: *Sanctify them, set them apart, for this mission.*

B. Sanctification with Truth

And how does that happen? Sanctify with the truth. How does being set apart for the purpose of His mission happen? It happens through the Bible. It says, "For I gave them the words You gave me and they accepted them. Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world."

The Bible is the primary means by which we are to be set apart. The Bible and the teachings of the Bible, knowing it, the worldview of the Bible, is the primary means that the Spirit uses to transform our lives to become like Christ in all of life. And that's why this is a Bible-teaching church. That's why we are surveying the Bible this year. It's the fifth time we've surveyed the Bible to get the big picture. It's why we have smaller groups, like small groups in homes or men's and women's groups, because we want to be able to apply the Bible to that kind of specific application for us. Then even those groups get even smaller still into little small groups.

How do we apply the Bible to us? We encourage you, we train you, we try to do everything we can to help you have an individual devotional life.

How does this Bible apply to me? God wants us to get that word that He gave to Jesus through the Holy Writ here into our souls so that we would be strengthened, fortified, combat ready to do the mission that He sent us on. That's His prayer, verse 11. It's our prayer for the people we love and the people God brought to us.

III. Jesus Prays for His Church

Jesus prayed for Himself, Jesus prayed for the eleven. Now He's going to pray for His church. Jesus prays for His church.

It won't be hard to see this, but look how much is committed to the unity of the Church. And when I think about when we surveyed the Bible over this year and we had COVID and all that craziness ... I don't know if you remember, but there were two or three times where we thought, *It's like this passage was written just for 2020.*

Well, here we are again. This section of Scripture I feel like ... I don't know what happened in the years previous to 2020, but it's for us right here and now. That's the way the Bible works. Jesus is going to pray for the unity of the Church and the love of the Church. He's going to say, *I want the same love that You showed me, Father. I want them to have it and show everybody else. And I want them to be unified. That's where their power will come from.*

John 17:20-

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. 23 I in them and You in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that You sent me and have loved them even as You have loved me. 26 ... that the love with which You have loved me may be in them, and I in them.0

Okay, here we go. "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message..." That's us. "... 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." In verse 23, it says, "I in them, You in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that You sent me and have loved them even as You have loved me." And then in verse 26 it says, "...that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

A. Love

Look at the power of that petition, if nothing else. He's talking about love in unity. Love on display is the single most powerful weapon, I guess, that we have as a church. It's our greatest apologetic or defense of our faith. What He says is, *Father, the love which You have given the Son, we're going to give that to them. And we want them to show it to everyone else.* And that's where we get, in many respects, this summary in a single phrase: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and might, and love your neighbor with that same kind of love, as yourself." That's why it's etched in glass right up there. That's our prime directive. That's our core belief. Those are our convictions that we live by. And this love silences the critics.

When people hate the Church or hate Christians, it's like, *Yeah, but we're doing this. Whatever.*

But it also leads people that are actually looking. The honest-to-goodness open-hearted people? They are extremely attracted to this. And at Grace, our clarity on call here is "Every believer is a minister." You are the ministers, and ministry is out there for you to find to do. And so, if you look at Grace Covenant Church and you look at the way we have shown the love that the Father has for the Son and we have that love for our city ... Twenty-six years ago, one of our members saw that there was a huge need for the homeless and those who are significantly disadvantaged, and we started Mission Possible. I think it's the largest (or if not the largest, one of the largest) inner city ministries in all of Austin. Twenty-six years, millions of dollars given, and it's worth millions of dollars in assets. It's a beautiful ministry to the city of Austin in ways that we can't do that. That's a ministry for you and the people that God has brought you.

We have an amazing, multi-dimensional marriage ministry here, from pre-marriage counseling and marriage counseling and Re|Engage. That's a ministry for you and for your ministry clients that God has brought you, so that you can have an opportunity to bring people here and say, "Hey, let's get our marriages together."

Our Celebrate Recovery ministry is—I don't know what to say—it's kind of like a twelve-step program, but we're not ashamed to say that Jesus is our higher power. And it's not just for chemical addictions; it's for just really bad habits or hang-ups that we can't seem to overcome without a powerful, grace-infused life experience. That's for you and the ministry that God has given you.

We have a ministry for every start or new thing. Brand new mom? We've got a ministry for you and for the people that God brings into your life. New to Austin? There's a lot of that going on. There's a ministry to you if you're new to Austin or for your neighbors that just moved in down the street. All of this is for you and for your ministry.

We have a prison ministry for you, maybe. Who knows what tomorrow will bring? But also for the people that you want to do ministry with.

Seriously, those are the big ministry things. I want you to stop and think of this, though, in light of His high priestly prayer for you and for me, for this church, for church people, for every person. In the context of missions or being on a mission, this is a target-rich environment we're living in. Friends, there are so many people that God has brought into your life, that live in your neighborhood, that used to work in the next cubicle and then they don't, and they are desperately in need of some kind of contact. God has brought us, you and me, into this time, at this place, for such a time as this. The good works in Jesus Christ that He arranged before the beginning of time included us in 2020. Pick up the phone. Call someone once a day. Just put your head down and say, "God, who do I call? Who needs the courage that only comes from You?" Maybe have a yard party for your whole neighborhood, just for your block, just for three houses on each side. I'm telling you, friends, there are so many people ripe for some kind of contact, and some people bringing in some kind of spiritual dynamic that there's a big picture of a sovereign God and it's all good. It is a good time to be on mission. Don't turn in. Don't play it safe. Make some phone calls.

B. Unity

John 17:23

I in them and You in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that You sent me ...

The second thing He talks about here is not just love, but unity. And He talks a lot about it. Verse 23 is a great summary for this. It says, "I in them and You in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that You sent me."

When the Church loses its unity, it is because they think something else is more important than Jesus. And when the Church is unified, it has unlimited potential. And the Church's unity is a sacred spiritual event that we have to participate in. It's both. It's God's doing, it's our doing. It has always been some kind of miracle where people have to choose.

When Jesus picks the disciples, friends—the more you know each of those people, the more you wonder how anyone lived through it. Because Simon the Zealot—if you know what that means, “Zealot” is not his middle name. It is a political badge that he wore. And the Zealots believed that the only way Israel could regain their God-given place in Israel was to kill the Romans. It was a violent group of people that said, *We've got to take up arms and riot this place into the ground.*

Meanwhile, Matthew, a Jew, is a tax collector. He's working for the Romans. He's a traitor.

So, Jesus recruits Simon the Zealot and Matthew the tax collector and says, *Let's go camping for three years. Let's see what happens.*

And Matthew's thinking, *Oh, I know what's going to happen. We're going to share a bunk bed together? I'll be dead in the morning. No way this works.*

I'd love to see what really happened during those three years, just the staring at each other. But I know what happened at the end of it. They were both so overwhelmed with their love for Jesus Christ they forgot their political affiliations. Matthew couldn't care less about money, no matter how he got it, and Simon was the pacifist. That's what happens.

They will know that we are Christians by our love for one another, our unity. And friends, if your heart is not grieving for America, I hope it is grieving for the Church. Not because we all agree that we should care for our fellow men and there's maybe ten different ways to care for our fellow men, but the way people in the Church attack each other with the misuse of words and calling each other names when it's not true, and then the condescension. It's like, *You're stupid for having these values.* What? We're family. We have more in common than any of these expressions of how to love each other.

Friends, the unity of the Church—I'm telling you, it's a spiritual, mystical reality. It is something that the Spirit of God is constantly working on. But on the other hand, we must participate, actively, passively, get involved and submit to that. And the unity of the Church—it's almost like the mission that we heard before—it's a means to an end. It's how we get good at

it. By becoming like Christ in all of life we humble ourselves and say, *Yeah, let's agree to disagree ... politely.*

But right now, we're just like disciples of the media and social media, and so we go crazy—on each other. But the hope of Jesus Christ, the hope that's found in the Bible for the promotion of the kingdom of God, God bringing redemption to those who are lost, is in the Church. That's His plan. In His bride—that's how it's going to work. The Church, unified, on mission.

And the Church, friends—if you think it's like this meeting—friends, the Church has survived the fall of Rome. It rode its way through the craziness and the evil of the Middle Ages. In almost some of your lifetimes it was killed. It was dormant during the Soviet Union era. It's thriving now. It endures China and their persecution. It's going to make it through the next four years, okay? We're part of that. We're a part of something so eternal, and we're not treating her as we should.

Disunity in the church happens not because we care about politics too much; but because we care about Jesus too little.

--J. D. Greear

I love what J. D. Greear says: “Disunity in the church happens not because we care about politics too much; but because we care about Jesus too little.” The hope of the world in the heart of Jesus is in the Church, on mission, unified, showing the love of God. That's the plan. We have to be part of that plan. Sanctified by the word, unified with each other through humility, to bring the message of God's love and wisdom to all the world. That's Jesus' prayer. That's a good prayer.

Application

You know what? Let's just pray that. We pray that at night every night. Let's just start praying that at night or in the morning or both, every day. That's a great outline. Jesus, I prayed for myself to be able to glorify You with whatever is sent my way. I pray for my friends and my family members, that they would have that kind of power, that they would enjoy the power that You give them; and that the Church would be unified so that they might bring love.

We have to be sanctified, strengthened, on mission, so that we can be unified and bring that love to the world. Here's what's really kind of beautiful. Like wait, there's more. It says in Hebrews that when Jesus ascended into heaven, He was seated at the right hand of the Father so that He might intercede for us. That means that He's praying for us. And so, when you pray to the Father, you're praying with the Son. And when the Son prays, I'll be it sounds a little bit like this: He prays for you, He prays for your friends and family, and He prays for the Church.

Let's pray to the Father, with the Son in this same outline.

Lord, we're flabbergasted, overwhelmed, enjoying the power of this wonderful prayer. I pray for myself, Lord. I pray that anything and everything You send me would be used to glorify You, whether winning or losing, in sickness and in health, in all things. I pray that I would have that character to see, no matter what happens, that You are a loving, sovereign God, even in my life.

Lord, I pray for my friends and my family, the people in my home group, the people in my Bible study that you have brought into my life to be fellow soldiers with me. I pray that You would protect us while we're on mission. Lord, I'd ask that Your Spirit would tell us if we've fallen off this horse one way or the other, if we're trying to play it safe and just holy huddling and just keeping away from the people that don't know You, I ask that You would convict us of that, and You'd bring us all to a place of redemption. And if we've gone on the other side of the horse and we've fallen off the other way and we're just blending in so nicely that we've lost our witness, God help us. But Lord, don't let us stay off that horse. Get us back on that horse. Sanctify us by Your word. Make it part of our worldview so we can stay on mission.

And Lord, I pray for our church, that the love and the unity of the Church would be so startling that people wouldn't know what to do or what to make of it, and they'd say, "What are you? Where are you from? Why do you care so much about this one thing that you don't care about all these other things?" Lord, I'd ask that we be that kind of church, that we could start right here. The health of Austin's church starts right here. And I pray for us, Grace Covenant Church. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Communion

Well, it only makes sense. Jesus was in the Upper Room for this discourse, and part of the Upper Room experience was this holy meal, the Lord's table. And we'd be missing something if we didn't do this together, especially in light of the Lord's holy prayer that we would be unified. It's called "communion." I mean, the word means "co-union." So, let's dine together, shall we?

At Grace we have a thing called open communion. And what that means is that if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, we'd love for you to join. You don't have to be a member of our church. You don't have to be a member even of whatever denomination or whatever it might be. If Jesus Christ is your Lord, if He's your King, could you join us for a meal? We'd love to share it.

Before we begin our time together, I thought we'd take the bread and the wine all together. So, let's stop and reflect. Jesus says this when we're instructed on how to do communion. He says, *You need to reflect on what you're doing.* It's supposed to be a time to stop and pause. It's part of a covenant renewal event. Are you part of the problem or are you part of the solution? Unity and love in the Church, mutual submission.

I'd love for us to all take the meal together and let's dwell on this. Do I need to do something to make things right towards a brother or sister or because maybe I showed disrespect or violated some words that didn't apply to them, but it made my point? Or I found myself in a proud, condescending "How could you think that?" point of view? How about we make a meal of this and say, *Okay, from this day forward, never. I've got to stop this. And maybe even make some phone calls and clean up some mess.*

Anyway, stop and think about this high priestly prayer, about being sanctified and holy, set apart for a purpose, unified to demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ. I'll be back. We'll take it together.

[Music plays.]

And Jesus took His happy meal packet and peeled it off ... these are silly, but they work great during a pandemic.

Jesus took the bread and He broke it and He said, "This is my body. It will be broken for you. This is how I'll make you one with me and the Father. I'll make you holy." Let's take the bread together.

After that He took the cup and He said, “This is my blood. We’re entering a new covenant, a covenant of grace, a grace covenant. Because it’s the only way that you’ll ever be made one with me. I had to pay the price that you couldn’t pay so that you might inherit the righteousness that you don’t deserve. Take this drink and remember me.”

Then Jesus said this. He said, “Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup while you’re on mission, stay holy, unified with other brothers and sisters. I’m coming back. I’ll make this right. Justice will prevail eventually. Do this in memory of me until I come in my glory.”

Why don’t we pray, and then just a few short words.

Lord Jesus, we are grateful for something like communion, the Lord’s Table, the Passover 2.0, to help us remember what we get to enjoy—so many different types of people, so many different colors and ethnic groups, and then we’re all this one thing. We’re the Church. We celebrate that, Lord. I’d ask that You would give us the courage to be on mission and to be holy while we do that. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Five-Minute Afterword

That’s good church, church. Hey, can you give me another five? I feel like something happened. I did this the last year or two years of my youth ministry. I started getting so old I could say things like a father. I’ve gotten so old again I can say things like a father. And I’m sixty now and I feel like I’m going to say a few things.

So, first of all, I’d like to introduce myself. My name is Matt and I’m addicted to media-driven anger. Yeah, I know. But I’m one week sober, baby! Do I look lighter? I feel lighter. The media and social media are literally getting us addicted to anger or fear, whichever we’re easiest prey to, for money, so they make money. And I have found ... I’m just going to quit watching anything and everything, except maybe the weather. I hope you join me.

Hey, did you notice this growing up? You don’t remember a lot of memories, you just remember a mood? That’s pretty common. I mean, even psychologists will say that children don’t remember things or events, they just remember the feeling of the household. Was their house safe? Did they have a fair amount of structure? Or was it volatile and you never knew what was going to happen next? Was it peaceful or was it always on edge somehow? Was there some kind of feel of fun? Or misery? That’s what happens in a family.

One of the things I'm concerned about is this climate these days is what's happening to our children. When I was growing up there was a season that was very dark and looks very similar. The Vietnam War was escalating, John F. Kennedy was assassinated, Martin Luther King's life was taken, and then Robert Kennedy was killed. All of this while the cities were burning. When my dad was home, he was angry. And my mother was afraid. And all they had to do was turn off the news.

And that season in my life as a little child—that mood changed me. Parents of young children, turn it off. It's not just you. You're bringing anger and you're bringing fear into your lives, into your living rooms, into the souls of your kids.

I was talking about this with our staff, and Robert Morris, who is extremely insightful, said, "You know what an idol is? An idol is something you think about always, you worry about regularly, and you evangelize." I know we think of idols as a thing that we bow down and worship. No, no, no, an idol is something you think about, worry about, and tell other people about. Because an idol shows itself as that's what my thought life is, that's what my ultimate trust is, that's what I'm passionate about. I can't wait to tell you about my views on this political thing.

Could it be that politics and anger-driven media and social media is an idol? There's only one way to deal with an idol. Kill it. I'm asking you again. Does anyone want to join me in this abstinence thing? Does anyone want just a desire chip to say, *Let's see how far we can go past November, into Thanksgiving, into Christmas, and just care about the people that God has brought into our lives.*

I'm appealing to you again one week sober. It's kind of fun. You know what's addicting? Unfollowing people that are mean. I'm telling you, it's good. I'm asking you one more time: let's be a church where we're disciples of Jesus Christ and not anyone else, okay?

Thanks again for hanging in here for these last five or six minutes. If you'll be dismissed as the ushers ask, that's the safest way to do things at this point. We'll see you next week, okay? Thanks.