

## United in Christ

John 17:1-26

This is the high priestly prayer of Jesus. As He prepared to go to the cross, this was His prayer for his disciples right then and for all believers who would come after them. These words of Jesus are what our Savior wants for us. This is what He prayed for us and continues to pray for us.

***The primary request of this prayer is for the glory of God.***

**May God be glorified through Jesus**

**“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.” John 17:1**

**Jesus was the perfect mirror**, reflecting all glory back to the Father. His whole life was the exact, radiant reflection - without a single blemish, failure or sin. The Father glorified the Son saying, “This is my beloved Son, with Him I am well pleased,” and the Son glorified the Father saying, “I can do nothing on my own but only what I see the Father doing.” And right up to the end of His earthly life Jesus remained committed to the Father’s will, praying, “Not my will but yours be done.”

This remains our prayer today - that God will be glorified through Jesus. Our mission as believers and as a church is to exalt Jesus as the all glorious Son of God and the all sufficient Savior so that He can draw all people to Himself. And as Jesus is glorified, God the Father is glorified.

But there is a specific request for **HOW Jesus will be most glorified** and that is:

**May Jesus be glorified through a Unified Church**

**“The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one... that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me.” John 17:22-23**

***When followers of Jesus come together in unity...*** when we love and serve one another well... when we are PERFECTLY ONE - that is when God is exalted as the bridge-building, unifying God of all love and that is when a watching world takes note that we have something worth exploring.

Yes, unity is a beautiful thing. But it is a fragile thing. Every local church has stories about times when unity was damaged or broken. Oakwood is no different. By the grace of God we have come through a time of healing and are now experiencing a sweet time of unity. But Oakwood, like every church, has had its share of challenges, conflicts and issues.

And that should be no surprise. Whatever God loves and desires ***the devil hates and attacks***. Our enemy loves to divide us, to create dissension - in our marriages, our families and in our churches. Whenever the devil can he will try to separate believers, to drive a wedge between us, to help plant a root of bitterness.

This is why **unity must be protected** like a beautiful but fragile plant. Jesus PRAYS for our unity. Think of that. 2,000 years ago ***Jesus prayed that OAKWOOD WOULD BE ONE***. And today we are a unified church in direct answer to that prayer of Jesus. "Yet not I, but through Christ in me," right?

But Jesus did not just pray for Oakwood - He prayed for His entire church - the global church - that all of us would be ONE, just as He and the Father are one. He prayed for perfect unity, harmony, fellowship, mutual love and honor and commitment. ***That will be our eternal experience*** and it is well worth our time and effort to pursue real, Christ-exalting unity today.

**The joke is often told** of the Lutheran who dies and goes to heaven and Peter is showing him around, and they come to a big wall and hear singing on the other side of it. The Lutheran asks Peter, "What's that? Who's in there?"

"Oh," Peter says, "That's the Baptists. They think they're the only ones here."

Ok, I picked on the Baptists because they're easy targets. But you could pick any denomination OR any ethnic group. "Oh, that's the upper-middle class American non-denominationalists - they think they're the only ones here." "Oh, that's the white Scandinavian hymn-singing Americans - they think they're the only ones here."

***Heaven will not be a room full of people who look just like you and talk just like you.*** Heaven will be filled with people from every tongue and tribe and nation - people from every walk of life - rich and poor, religious and non-religious, former Muslims, former Hindus, former Buddhists, former American materialists, former sinners, addicts and hypocrites. The one common denominator in heaven is that it will be filled with sinners who have been forgiven and who are united in our love for Jesus and who will delight to sing His praises FOREVER.

**Jesus paid an infinite price for our unity.** We will enjoy that unity for the endless ages of eternity. May we protect that unity, fight for that unity and work to reflect that unity for the glory of Jesus! As we live out gospel unity the power of Jesus will be revealed and the people around us will pause to wonder if we might actually have something they might want and need.

Today we will see **four gifts from Jesus** - four gifts He gave us so the we would be one. Unity would be impossible apart from these gifts. But because Jesus gave us these gifts; ***because He prayed for our unity and because He PAID for our unity*** - we know that unity is not only possible, it is NECESSARY. We ARE one in Christ. May we live out the unity He purchased for us on the cross!

### **Gifts from Jesus for our Unity**

1. His **Love** to connect us

**“You have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you...” John 17:2-3**

***Jesus alone can connect you with God the Father.*** He alone is the way, the truth, and the life. Authority was given to Jesus - and only Jesus - to give eternal life to those chosen by the Father. Jesus has authority over all flesh - all people - and, indeed, over all things. And in His love and mercy He has chosen to give US eternal life.

And **the definition of eternal life** is right there in verse three – “that they KNOW YOU, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” That is what eternal life is all about – knowing God, seeing Him, being with Him.

Only Jesus can make that connection.

***Have you ever met someone who is famous?*** For that to happen, you needed someone to make the connection for you. Famous people have security details and assistants to keep the riff raff – like us – away from them. Jason and I recently got to meet a couple of pro baseball players.



**Oscar Mercado**  
**Indians CF**



**Kyle Schwarber**  
**Cubs LF**

You can see our baseball loyalties. We got to shag balls for Kyle and Oscar (we're on first name basis now), and five other players. It was super fun. But it only happened because we had someone to connect us. Jason and I could never have gotten to these two guys on our own. ***We needed someone to make the introduction.***

Dave Depagter, our church treasurer, lives next door to Jason Romano, who is the agent for these two guys and helps set up their off season workouts down at Jefferson High School. Dave

introduced us to Jason who invited us to this workout and brought us up to these players. As you can see, I'm a little excited about this.

Jason Romano represents these players. He brought us to them. ***Jesus represents God the Father. He alone can bring you to the Father.*** He has authority over eternal life and eternal judgment. He alone can protect you from judgment and give you the gift of eternal life. He alone can do this, because He loved us enough to die for us.

### **Gifts from Jesus for our Unity**

#### **1. His Love to connect us**

**"I made known to them your name... that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." John 17:26**

God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son. Jesus loved us so much that He gave up His life for us. He did this to connect us with the Father in a reconciled relationship and to connect us with one another. He did this to transform us from selfish people into loving people – ***to fill us with HIS love.***

If you belong to Jesus in faith then this is the love that is inside of you – the love with which the Father has eternally loved the Son. This is perfect love, infinite love, constant, overflowing, self-giving love. That is the love that Jesus places in our hearts as He connects us with Himself and with the Father.

And this is **the key to loving one another** – experiencing the love of God so that love increasingly flows through us. We let His self-sacrificing love wash away our self-indulgent, self-focused NON-love and make us more patient, kind, generous, understanding, compassionate and good.

- If you struggle ***to love your husband or wife***, this is the place to focus. Remember how God has loved you in Christ – forgiving you, washing away your sin, accepting you with all of your flaws. Experience His self-giving love and you will then have love and grace to share with your mate.
- If you struggle ***to love someone in your Community Group***, this is the place to focus. Remember how patient God has been with you – how difficult you were, how self-absorbed and prideful you used to be. Then apply that same kind of grace to the people in your group.
- Maybe there is ***something at Oakwood that isn't your favorite***. I can't imagine what that would be, since we have the perfect church, but let's just imagine. Let's say that once in a while the songs aren't what you might choose or the kids are too loud or someone makes a mess in your classroom or – heaven forbid – the preacher says something that confuses you or he goes on and on one Sunday, well beyond his allotted 40 minutes. Here is where you should focus – on the love of God in Christ. Remember all that Jesus gave up to save you – the price He paid for your sin – the cross He had to bear. And that will give you love to share with the rest of us imperfect people – we are your cross to bear.

Jesus gave us His love to connect us with God and each other. That was his first gift to make us one. Second:

### **Gifts from Jesus for our Unity**

#### **2. His Name to protect us**

**“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world... Holy Father, keep them in your name... that they may be one.” John 17:6,11**

The name of Jesus. In Hebrew it was Yeshua, or Joshua. The name means Savior – Salvation. Names were very meaningful in ancient times. Your name defined who you were and who you were with.

If you read through the Bible you quickly notice that in many places there are **long lists of names**. Usually we skip these sections or skim over them. But the Jewish people, still today, are known for their commitment to tracking genealogies – tracing their ancestry – because your family name matters, it shows where you came from; who you are.

***How far back can you trace your ancestry?*** My Anderson side only goes back three generations, to my great-grandparents. But my mom’s side, the Randall side, goes back all the way to 1637 and the Massachusetts Bay Colony. We know a family member was there because John Randall is named as one of the twenty men who went on a raid to kill Indians. Good old Uncle John. His one thing in history is documented for killing native Americans. That is my ancestry.

What about you? What does your NAME say about you? What legacy comes with your family?

- Did your parents and grandparents provide an inheritance? Was ***financial provision*** a blessing from your family?
- Did faith come from your family? Is there a legacy of ***following Jesus*** that goes back generations?
- Is love and ***healthy relationships*** a legacy in your family? Are you close with your extended family, with many traditions in coming together?
- Or does your family have a legacy of dysfunction? Broken relationships... divorce... conflict... instead of giving money is there a history of taking from each other? Instead of caring for each other, is there a pattern of harming each other?

What comes with YOUR family name? Good, bad, ugly...

Look what comes with JESUS’ family name: protection. The name of Jesus is our shelter, our refuge, our hope, our salvation. Romans 10 presents this gospel truth:

### **Gifts from Jesus for our Unity**

#### **2. His Name to protect us**

**“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Romans 10:13**

That is how you come under the protection of Jesus for the first time – you call on Him to save you. It begins with the verbal profession, “Jesus is Lord.” “If you confess with your mouth,

‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9). Peter says in Acts 4:

### **Gifts from Jesus for our Unity**

#### **2. His Name to protect us**

“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men, by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12

There is only one way to be saved – only one way to get to heaven – and that is to call on the name of Jesus. His name is the **ONLY NAME** that can save you.

***When you stand before God in judgment, whose name will you call on?***

- Your own name will do you no good. Appealing to your own achievements will only draw attention to your own failures and sins.
- Your parents’ names will do you no good. Just because mom and dad believed in Jesus and followed him does not mean that their faith can save you.
- Your pastor’s name will do you no good. It doesn’t matter how many sermons you listen to or how much money you gave or how many hours you volunteered. No church or pastor can save you.

**There is only ONE NAME that can save you.** The name of Jesus. The name that is above every name. The name before which, one day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Notice WHY Jesus protects us in His name:

### **Gifts from Jesus for our Unity**

#### **2. His Name to protect us**

“Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.” John 17:11

***There is no division in the Godhead.*** Yes, God is Triune – three persons in one God. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But God is One, existing in perfect, eternal harmony. So there is only One Savior – One Lord – Jesus Christ. There is only One Spirit to lead and empower us. And there is only one church.

- The Evangelical Free Church cannot protect you – only Jesus can.
- The Baptist Church does not own salvation – only Jesus does.
- The Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Assemblies, or whatever other denomination – those names cannot save you. There is only One Name.

And that’s the point. **ONE name.** Jesus is not divided. And His Church is not divided. There is only One True Church on this planet and throughout history. A great tragedy of history is that churches so often divide and denominations divide and divide again. But Jesus is One and the true Church is One.

By the grace of God we are seeing encouraging trends toward unity and cooperation across the country and right here in the Bay. 25 pastors came together in January for 3 days of worship and



prayer. Regional prayer gatherings are gaining momentum as pastors come together each month to pray for an encourage one another. This is resulting in cooperative efforts in evangelism and community service.

- Did you know that every month Oakwood leads a worship service at **the Colonnade**, a nursing home right up Casey Road? Three other churches rotate with us in leading this service – a beautiful picture of our unity in serving these seniors who can't get away to come to a local church.
- In May several Tampa area churches will be working together on an ***evangelism campaign in Seminole Heights*** – watch for more details on that soon. There is a church there we want to help revitalize and we are wanting to help South Bay plant a new church there as well.

Jesus' love connects us with God and each other. His name protects us even as it unites us in Him. The third gift for our unity:

### **Gifts from Jesus for our Unity**

#### **3. His Word to perfect us**

**"For I have given them the words that you gave me... Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." John 17: 8,17**

To be sanctified is to be made HOLY, like Jesus. This is the process we are in right now as believers. At the moment you called on Jesus to save you, you were **JUSTIFIED** – your sins washed away and the righteousness of Christ given to you as a credit. Throughout our lives we are **SANCTIFIED**. Justification is an event. Sanctification is a process. At the end of that process, when you die or Jesus comes back, you will be **GLORIFIED**. That is when you will be totally perfected.

***But sanctification is the process by which the Holy Spirit chips away*** at our remaining sin and makes us more and more like Jesus. He does this through His Word. During his earthly life Jesus taught his disciples – words we still have preserved in the gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit guided the apostles, including Paul, to write other books and letters, which make up the rest of our New Testament. These are the words by which God makes us holy – by which we grow.

**Three habits** that are critical to grow as a follower of Jesus are:

1. Bible reading
2. Bible meditation and
3. Bible discussion

All three are important for different reasons. Daily reading of the Bible helps teach us the BREADTH of God's will and His work. It allows the Holy Spirit to show us new things we hadn't considered before.

Bible meditation and memorization are vital to go deep with just a verse or two. Let the Word of God percolate in your heart and mind throughout the day, or a whole week. Memorize an entire

Psalm or longer passage, like Romans 8 or Philippians 2. Lately I've been working on 1 Peter 1. "Preparing your minds for action, being sober minded, set your hope fully On the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Set your hope FULLY. Is that where my hope is? On that future grace? That eternal blessing that will be mine in Christ? Or is my hope – some part of it – fixed on this world, on myself?

Bible discussion is also essential to Christian growth. We need each other. Remember, all of these gifts are for our UNITY. The lone ranger Christian is an impossibility. True Christians know how much they need fellowship and connection with other believers. We need prayer, encouragement, guidance, mentoring, love, support... the list is endless.

***And we need accountability.*** A common mistake believers make is making most of our friends in our same age group and life stage. But if everyone has the same issues and problems you are the blind leading the blind. You need someone a few years ahead of you – a life stage or two ahead of you – someone who has been through these struggles, fallen in the traps and can guide you through them without falling in.

- In your work you would never put a new factory worker in training with another new factory worker. Neither one know the dangers or the best ways to do the work. Both would chop their fingers off or do things inefficiently.
- No, you place a new worker with your best veteran and teacher so he learns what to do and what not to do.
- In a recovery program you never take a guy who has just gotten sober and give him a sponsor who has also just gotten sober. You connect him with a sponsor who has been sober for several years, maybe decades. Two drunks or two guys struggling with porn can't help each other. They both keep failing the same way. They need someone who has learned NOT TO fail, not to fall.
- Ladies, if you struggle with gossip, don't find another lady who also struggles with gossip. If you struggle with self-image, don't look for encouragement from someone your age who battles the same thing. Go to an older woman who has worked through those things and established her identity so securely in Christ that she can guide you to that kind of security.

We need each other. We need peers beside us in the battle, but we also need coaches ahead of us.

Jesus gave us His Word to perfect us. Let's not use the Word of God to beat each other down – it is a hammer and a sword and can be used that way. Rather, let's use the Word of God to build each other up and to do surgery to help each other reach freedom and victory and joy and maturity in Christ!

One more gift from the Lord for our unity:

### **Gifts from Jesus for our Unity**

#### **4. His Glory to reflect from us**



**“The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one, even as we are one.” John 17:22**

As I’ve studied John 17 in recent years, this is the point that blows me away. **The glory of Jesus** – the radiant splendor and majesty of the only Son of God – is the glory that Jesus has given to us! His very own glory – His holiness – His own Spirit – Jesus has given to us, so that we may be one in the same way the Father and Son are one.

How much has God invested in our unity? Infinite resources! He has given us everything. He has given us HIMSELF.

Jesus opened this prayer by asking the Father to glorify Him so that He, in turn, could glorify the Father. Jesus is the perfect mirror. 100% of the glory the Father poured out on Jesus, Jesus reflected back to the Father. We are imperfect mirrors, cracked, broken, darkened with our sin and selfishness so that we absorb most of what God pours into us and only reflect a portion of it.

***But think about the person next to you.*** Don’t you see in them a reflection of the glory of Jesus? It’s a dim reflection, for sure, but still – the glory of Jesus is in there!

If you consider the perfections of Jesus – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, wisdom, zeal, devotion – is there one that you really see in that person next to you? Think of what it would be.

Now say to that person,

**“I see in you a DIM REFLECTION of the \_\_\_\_\_ of Jesus.”**

**“The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one.” John 17:22**

- His love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control
- His humility, zeal, generosity, wisdom and hope

Jesus has given all of this to us in Himself. It is our job to reflect His glory to the people around us. Are you growing in love and the other fruits of the Spirit? Are you becoming more and more like Jesus?

***Is the mirror of your life reflecting more and more of the glory of Jesus?*** Or over the years is your mirror becoming darker and more absorbent? Are you trying to keep the glory and recognition more for yourself?

### **Gifts from Jesus for our Unity**

#### **4. His Glory to reflect from us**

**“The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one... that they may be perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me.” John 17:23**

***Our unity as a church is a testimony of the truth of the gospel.*** We proclaim this message that Jesus has washed away our sins and drawn us into Himself, the God of Love. Why should the

world around us believe that message if we are not increasingly loving? We proclaim a message of a Savior who gave Himself up as a sacrifice for sinners. Why should the world believe that message if we aren't willing to make sacrifices for one another? We proclaim a message about being united with God and one with each other. Why should the world believe this message if our churches continue to split and different churches can't or won't ever work together?

Here at Oakwood we are committed to building up our church. We want to reach as many people as we can and invite them into our worship and fellowship so they can grow with us. We pray that Oakwood will grow, mainly by drawing in unchurched people. We don't want to grow by taking people from other Bible-teaching churches, but by taking people from the kingdom of darkness and drawing them into the light of Jesus Christ.

But as we work to **build up our church**, our ultimate commitment is to **building up THE church**. We want to labor alongside every gospel-preaching church in the city to reach every man, woman and child in Tampa Bay with the gospel. We want to support efforts to revitalize churches and plant new churches; to support good Christian ministries and help start new ones.

We are praying for *revival in Tampa Bay* to accelerate the building of the church here. But even revival is not the end goal – the goal of revival would be to gather in more workers so we can send more workers out to complete the great commission and reach people all over the world who have yet to hear the good news of Jesus Christ.