

Text— John 17:20-26

Fellow redeemed sinners, redeemed by the blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,

The entire 17th chapter of the Gospel of Saint John contains a prayer Jesus rendered shortly before He suffered and died for the sins of the world. Jesus began by praying He might be glorified as He finished the saving work His heavenly Father gave Him to do. Then, Jesus prayed for His disciples, for He said, “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.” (John 17:6-15)

Subsequently, in the words which comprise our Scripture selection, we observe that Jesus prayed for those who would come to faith in Him by means of the Word which would be proclaimed by His faithful disciples. Hence, prayer was very important to Jesus.

Accordingly, we present-day Christians need to value and appreciate the fact that our Lord and Savior actually prayed for us; therefore, to help us do so, let us ponder our Scripture selection in which we see:

“JESUS’ PRAYER FOR HIS CHURCH”

With that as our theme may we, in view of our text and with the help of the Holy Ghost, see—

- 1) Who Jesus addressed in prayer
- 2) Who the members of Jesus’ Church are for whom He prayed
- 3) What Jesus prayed for concerning His Church
- 4) Why Jesus prayed for His Church

-1-

Looking back at John 17:1, we read, “These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.” Then in our text, in verses 21, 24 and 25 of John chapter 17, we observe Jesus identifying His heavenly Father as the Person to whom He was praying. Thus, by Jesus’ example we see that God alone is to be addressed in prayer, not angels or mother Mary or any other departed saint since they cannot hear or answer prayers, for in speaking to the Lord the prophet Isaiah says, “Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O LORD, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting.” (Isaiah 63:16) Furthermore, it is sinful idolatry to pray to anyone other than God, for Jesus declares in Matthew 4:10, “it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”

Thus, take it to heart that the true God alone is to be addressed in prayer— the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Realize that when one addresses God the Father in prayer, one also addresses God the Son and God the Holy Ghost as well, for 1 John 5:7 informs us: “there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.”

Hence, let us follow Jesus' example by praying to our heavenly Father.

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As we continue to ponder our text, let us see who the members of Jesus' Church are for whom He prayed.

Verses 20 & 21, ----- (John 17:20-21)

Jesus had prayed for His disciples who were present with Him as He visibly walked on earth during the days of His public ministry. Then, as Jesus continued in prayer, He said: *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*

Note the criteria which defines the true members of Jesus' Church: ALL those persons and only those persons WHO BELIEVE ON JESUS CHRIST through His disciples' WORD— the WORD OF GOD which the disciples preached and penned by inspiration of God! Recall in the introduction to this sermon that I read what Jesus prayed in regards to His disciples: Jesus said in prayer to His heavenly Father – as recorded in John 17:14 – “I have given them thy word.” Hence, the disciples did not preach and teach their own thoughts and opinions; rather, they preached and taught the Holy Word of God.

My friends, the true members of Jesus' Church are ALL those persons and only those persons WHO BELIEVE ON JESUS CHRIST through the Word of God, for the Apostle Paul writes, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Romans 1:16-17; 10:17) Thus, it is by God-given faith in Jesus Christ as one's personal

Savior and Lord that one becomes a true member of Jesus' Church, which is also known as the Holy Christian Church and the communion of saints.

Notice in our text that to be “in” Jesus by faith is also to be “in” the Father as well, since Jesus prays to His Father that His believers would be *one in us*. Accordingly, those with God-given faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord believe in the Jesus Christ of the Holy Bible and no other— the Jesus Christ who was sent by His heavenly Father into the world to redeem the world; the Jesus Christ who in honesty says, as recorded in John 10:30, “I and my Father are one.” Hence, genuine God-given faith in Jesus Christ is faith that is worked in the heart by means of God's Word – the Gospel of Christ in particular – by the Holy Ghost who is one with the Father and the Son, for we read in 1 Corinthians 12:3, “Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.” And, we read in Romans 8:9, “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” Therefore, the true members of Jesus' Church, the Holy Christian Church, have God-given faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord— the Jesus Christ who is one with the Father and the Holy Ghost.

Take it to heart that simply saying one is a Christian does not make one a Christian; no, genuine, heart-deep, God-given faith in the Jesus Christ of the Holy Bible makes one a true Christian, regardless of any outward attachment one may have with a visible church body. Holy Writ is clear, for we read in John 3:16-18, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” And, concerning God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, Colossians 1:18 reports, “he is the head of

the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.” Thus, the Holy Christian Church, Jesus’ Church, consists of true believers in Him and only true believers in Him.

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As we continue to ponder our text, let us see what Jesus prayed for concerning His Church.

Again, verse 21, ----- (John 17:21)

Observe that Jesus prayed for unity in His Church, that its members *all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.* Note well that unity in the faith of Jesus Christ testifies to the world that Jesus was sent by God the Father. Accordingly, the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians, saying, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” (Ephesians 4:1-6) Thus, a humble and loving attitude is to prevail among Christians, coupled with real oneness in beliefs by holding fast to all the doctrines of the Holy Bible.

My friends, the disunity which prevails in the visible Christian church on earth is due to the widespread abandoning of God’s true Word as all too many preachers are found worshiping Jesus Christ “in vain” as they are “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” (Mark 7:7) Let us lovingly pray that real repentance and genuine faith in Jesus Christ would grow among people in this world while there is yet time.

Verse 22, ----- (John 17:22)

Think about what Jesus meant when He prayed that those who would come to believe on Him as the Savior sent by God the Father are *given the glory which the Father gavest Jesus; that they may be one, even as Jesus and the Father are one.* It refers back to the fact that Jesus was glorified as He completed the saving work He was sent by God the Father to accomplish: our redemption.

Jesus has given us believers that glory which the Father gave Him in that we are adopted children of God by faith in Him— faith wrought in us by means of the “glorious Gospel of Christ,” as 2 Corinthians 4:4 labels it. “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus,” declares Galatians 3:26-28.

Yes, Jesus Christ is God the Father’s natural Son, begotten of the Father from eternity; however, we Christians are God the Father’s adopted sons and we thereby share in Jesus’ glory, for Hebrews 2:9-12 reports: “we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.” Think of it: our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is not ashamed to call us His brethren! Thus, we share in Jesus’ glory.

Verse 23, ----- (John 17:23)

As Jesus continued His prayer for us Christians who would come later, He declared to His heavenly Father concerning us: *I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast*

loved them, as thou hast loved me. Thus, the indwelling of God the Father and God the Son in all true Christians testifies to the world that the Father sent the Son to provide folks with what they need: the forgiveness of sins and salvation.

Indeed, we Christians are made perfect in one, in Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ has provided us with the perfect righteousness we need, “Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” (Romans 3:22-26)

Fellow Christians, God the Father loves us so much that He has made us His own by adopting us, for “when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.” (Galatians 4:4-7) Thus, the fact that we are Christians is because Jesus redeemed us and Jesus’ prayer for us was answered.

Verse 24, ----- (John 17:24)

This verse of our text is yet another wonderful blessing for which Jesus asked His heavenly Father on our behalf, for Jesus said: *Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.*

Jesus has been loved by His heavenly Father before

the foundation of the world, yea, from all eternity, since He is in fact one with God the Father and God the Holy Ghost. Now, consider where Jesus is presently dwelling in glory, for 1 Peter 3:22 reports that He “is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.” Hence, Jesus has prayed that you, me, and all other true Christians will one day be with Him in heaven, beholding His glory!

Accordingly, we have quite a wonderful future awaiting us since we know Jesus’ prayer will positively be answered for all of us who sincerely believe on Him as our personal Savior and Lord, for 1 Corinthians 13:12 declares, “now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” Indeed, for Holy Writ further states, “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” (Colossians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) Note well that “our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.” (Philippians 3:20-21) Thus, we are to keep our focus on Christ and His visible return at the end of days when He will take us from this vale of tears to be with Himself in heaven in glory.

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As we ponder the remaining verses of our text, let us see why Jesus prayed for His Church.

Verses 25 & 26, ----- (John 17:25-26)

Think about the closing words of our text, for Jesus

in concluding His prayer for His Church thereby shows why He prayed for His Church.

Fellow Christians, Jesus prayed for us and all other true Christians because we know Jesus was sent by God the Father, the righteous Father who demands perfect righteousness of all people if they would enter heaven when they depart this life.

Jesus prayed for His Church that we Christians might have God's love in us, and that Jesus Himself might dwell in us, for without God's love in Christ in us we will fall from faith and thereby be lost, for Jesus says in John 15:5-6, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." Yes, the fires of hell await all those who are found without faith in Jesus Christ, for Mark 16:16 plainly states, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

Let us therefore daily and sincerely repent of our sins; let us keep our full trust and confidence in Christ Jesus as our personal Savior and Lord; and, let us go forward being ever grateful for Jesus' prayer for His Church, because without God's continued grace we would end up lost and damned, for 1 Peter 1:5 reveals that we Christians "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." So, I repeat, let us go forward being ever grateful for Jesus' prayer for His Church. Amen.

m.e.l.