

Prayer is a bit of a problem, isn't it?

I don't mean prayer is difficult.

Though I think it is.

But it is a problem theologically & existentially.

Theologically, because of its relationship to a sovereign God who not only knows the end from the beginning but has planned the end from the beginning!

If God is sovereign, then whatever the poster of a beautiful sunset says with the text "*Prayer changes things*" written on it, we have to ask if it actually does?

Related to this, but distinct enough to mention it, what about the existential question of unanswered prayer.

It's said the God has 3 responses to our prayer: Yes; No; *you've got to be kidding!*

Even when I pray fervently, expectantly, wisely & consistently (all features of prayer the Bible encourages me to think will get answered positively), the answer not infrequently turns out to be no!

How do we process that?

I mention these problems because I used to think that this prayer suffered the same issues.

Particularly when we get to vv.20-26 where the scope of the prayer widens from there & then to here & now!

Look at v.20: "*My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message...*".

I'm not sure if you've twigged this yet, but that's us!

We believe in Jesus because of the apostolic message!

Which means that Jesus is praying for us.

It's as though we're eavesdropping into his prayer & then all of sudden we get a mention!

Wow! It's the kind of experience which should send a tingle down our spines.

Jesus prayed for *us*.

Jesus prayed for *me*.

2000 years ago!

But, it's precisely at this point that the problem occurs.

Look at what he prays in v.21: ... *"that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you"*.

A petition he repeats in vv.22-23: *"...that they may be one as we are one, I in them & you in me, so that they may be brought to complete unity"*.

At face value, it seems as though Jesus is praying for all those who will believe in him to know a deep & comprehensive unity.

It's certainly how this verse is viewed & used.

It's the poster text for ecumenical events & has been for as long as I've been on the block!

If that's right, then this seems to be one of those prayers which comes into a 2 category in terms of the Father's response: *No!*

Thinking about it, maybe it's a category 3: *You've got to be kidding!*

Seriously.

Have you looked around at the church scene lately?

We've got:

- Baptists
- Anabaptists
- Presbyterians
- Methodists
- Pentecostals
- Charismatics
- Hyper-charismatics
- Cessionists
- Orthodox
- Catholic
- Pre-Millennialists
- A-Millennialists
- Pre-Trib, pre Millennialists
- Lutherans

- Independents
- Reformed
- Really-Reformed
- Moravian
- Amish
- Quakers
- Full Gospel
- Half Gospel!

The list is almost endless.

For most people, that list is all the proof we need that Jesus prayed for unity among his disciples & the Father quietly shook his head, smiled & said: *Not. A. Chance!*

But, here's the thing.

I don't think for one moment that the Father denied what the Son asked for on this occasion.

We do know that the Father was not averse to declining his Son's requests.

It was a little later, when he was in the Garden of Gethsemene & Jesus asked: "*Father, if possible, please take this cup from me*".

As he faced crucifixion & all it entailed, he felt at liberty to request a stay of execution.

But the Father said *No!*

However, on this occasion, I'm certain that the Father said a loud & emphatic *Yes!*

As in, *You bet!*

Or, *You got it, Son!*

Allow me to show you what I mean.

Jesus is sending his followers into the world.

That's why they're called apostles.

The word just means sent ones.

They have been the subject of his prayers since v.6.

As we've seen, he now broadens the scope & prays for all those who come to put their trust in Christ through the message of these 'sent ones'.

So, notice 2 critical issues:

(1) His prayer for his apostles is given a resounding 'Yes'!

Jesus has been praying for them, asking for them to be protected so that they might faithfully proclaim the word entrusted to them in a hostile world.

Jesus asks that they might be set apart by that word for the sake of that word.

Jesus wants them to be missionaries.

To go out & about, proclaiming Christ.

He knows they will be met with opposition.

He knows it will not be easy.

Which is precisely why he prays for them.

They have an important role in that they will continue the work Jesus began.

The teaching from ch.14 onwards is centred upon this question of hand-over.

- I'm going. You're staying
- You have a task to do. I have a Helper to give.

This prayer is predicated on that commission.

And it is clear from v.20 that his prayers are answered.

Why?

Because he prays for those who will believe in him through their message.

They might be being sent into the world like lambs to wolves, but against the odds, they will prevail.

The world will do its worst.

Satan will growl & snarl, prowl & nibble, but he will prove utterly powerless to stop the onward march & global progress of the gospel.

The world will be filled with those who believe in Christ through the witness of the apostles & the apostolic witness.

(2) His prayer for his church is given a resounding 'Yes'!

What Jesus does here is tie this church here in Raleigh, NC with those people back there in Jerusalem.

The unity for which Jesus prays is not merely that believers around the world, nor even in one place, might all just somehow get along.

He wants his Father to secure a unity which transcends:

- geographical-boundaries
- cultural-divides
- class-divisions
- ethnic-segregation
- generational-separation
- temporal-isolation.

If I may phrase it in a culturally sensitive way: *Jesus is as much concerned about the unity y'all share with the apostles as he is with the unity y'all share with each other!*

The word, the message is the gospel - the good news of all that God has done for us in Christ & all that he has for us in Christ.

It is that gospel that creates a unity which spans both time & space.

Unity between us & the apostles.

Unity between us & everyone else who has believed the apostolic message.

Unity between us here now.

Unity between this Englishman & you Tea-Party rebels!

All of which is predicated on & flows out of the unity we enjoy with God himself in all his triune glory!

This unity is not an institutional or organisational unity.

Jesus is not praying for the demolition of denominations!

He's praying for the effectiveness of the gospel.

He's praying for the gospel to do its work of securing for us a union with the Father & the Son that reflects the unity they enjoy & a unity with all those in Christ, from whenever & wherever!

There is no doubt about the unity enjoyed between Jesus & his Father.

Likewise, there is no doubt about the unity we enjoy with Christ as the vine metaphor in ch.15 demonstrated.

So there is no doubt about the unity between every single one of us who has heard the saving word & believed in the Saviour King.

I wonder if this illustration will help?

I've had the privilege of being married to Mrs T for 39 years & we have 4 adult children as a result of our union.

Whatever happens to our children or whatever happens between our children they cannot undo the fact that they are our children & they are each other's siblings.

That status is unalterable.

Those relationship's are a given, a matter of biological & historical fact.

So it is with our union with the Father & Son, and because of that with the apostles, the church throughout the centuries & believers around the world.

We are those in union with Christ through his word.

Which means we are in union with all those who enjoy union with Christ through his word.

I want us to notice 3 glorious realities which come from this gospel-word secured union.

3 realities for which Jesus prays & to which the Father gives an affirming, resounding & determined Amen!

As we look at these, you will notice a recurring theme.

We see how Jesus views them in terms of their glorious fulfilment.

We will also consider them in terms of what that means for our present experience of them.

Mission

Look at vv.21 & 23.

There is something about this union which will be confirmatory of the person and work of Christ.

The union we enjoy with the Father & the Son, the union we enjoy with every other person who has responded in faith to the apostolic message, is intended to demonstrate the authenticity of Christ & the efficiency of his work.

But when?

Look at the phrase in v.23: "*perfectly one*" or "*complete unity*".

The word translated by those points to an end product.

An end product as in fulfilment, or completion.

There will be a time when our union with the Father & Son, our unity with each other will be put on display in order to validate the gospel.

A time when our union will be so clear that no one will be able to deny the effectiveness of the work of Christ & the word about that work.

When that happens, the world (as in those who have rejected the apostolic message, not believed the gospel) will have no choice but to concur.

Grudgingly for sure.

But they will concede, though they will despise what they cannot deny.

The prospect of that glorious moment of denouement should be exhilarating to us!

It should also inform how we live in the present.

That visible demonstration of our unity should thrill us & encourage us to live in the light of it now in the present.

Knowing our union with the Father & Son & with all those who have believed the apostolic message is real & glorious, we should be encouraged & inspired to live that out in the moment.

Look around us!

See this motel crew & be excited about what we enjoy in terms of our relationship with God & one another.

Consider the global reality of this micro expression.

Imagine a unity which, even now, demolishes the:

- cultural-divide
- class-divisions
- ethnic-segregation
- generational-separation

Let's prayerfully & passionately pursue one another, so that we commend Christ & his work in the present, so that others may believe in the here & now!

Glory

This is an interesting word, isn't it?

Jesus uses it in v.22 & a couple of times in v.24.

In the first reference, he describes it as something they have already seen or experienced.

In the second one, as something future.

According to Don Carson, "*glory commonly refers to the manifestation of God's character or person in a revelatory context*".

Primarily it spoke of the cross as the climactic display, v.1.

Because of this, we ought not to draw too sharp a distinction between the glory of Jesus in his life & death, & the glory of Jesus in that moment of final revelation.

As we hear the apostolic preaching of Christ Crucified & through the Holy Spirit have our eyes opened to see in that not shame but glory, we anticipate that moment when we will see him face-to-face!

This is Jesus asking the Father to see through his commitment to us & bring us all through.

To which the Father replies, "*For sure*"!

As we anticipate that, we can know & enjoy something of it in our experience now.

Principally through a present experience of our union with Christ & one another.

When Christ is revealed on that glorious day, what joy shall fill our heart.

Imagine the joy & elation at seeing him!

We are his & he is ours.

That experience of glory should be anticipated now!

Love

In v.24, Jesus speaks of the love of the Father for his Son from before the creation of the world.

In v.26, he asks for that love to be enjoyed by his people!

This is the very essence of our union with Christ.

This is it's very heart!

It was Jonathan Edwards who preached a sermon entitled *Heaven is a World of Love*.

Let me read this extended quote to finish:

“The Apostle tells us that God is love.

Therefore seeing he is an infinite Being, it follows that he is an infinite fountain of love.

Seeing he is an all-sufficient Being, it follows that he is a full & overflowing & an inexhaustible fountain of love.

Seeing he is an unchangeable & eternal Being, he is an unchangeable & eternal source of love.

There even in heaven dwells that God from whom every stream of holy love, yea, every drop that is or ever was proceeds...

There dwells God the Father & so the Son, who are united in infinitely dear & incomprehensible mutual love.

There dwells God the Father, who is the Father of mercies, & so the Father of love...

There dwells Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, the Prince of peace & love, who so loved the world that he shed his blood & poured out his soul unto death for it.

There dwells the Mediator, by whom all God's love is expressed to the saints, by whom the fruits of it have been purchased & through whom they are communicated & through whom love is imparted to the hearts of all the church.

There Christ dwells in both his natures, his human & divine, sitting with the Father in the same throne.

There is the Holy Spirit, the spirit of divine love, in whom the very essence of God, as it were, all flows out or is shed abroad in the hearts of all the church.

There in heaven this fountain of love, this eternal 3-in-1, is set open without any obstacle to hinder access to it."

That's there. This is now.

Let's enjoy & drink deeply as we anticipate that which is to come.