

We are in week 10 of our Gospel of John series and this week, as with our last two sermons, we are being given a behind the scenes look at one of the most intimate and important moments in Jesus' life... a time referred to as 'The Last Supper.' Now, all four gospel writers tell us about the Last Supper, but none of the other 3 gospel writers give us as many details about that evening as John. And John must have thought it was important to tell us as much as possible about that evening because he gave a huge portion of his book... everything from the first verse of Chapter 13 through the end of chapter 17, 153 verses... to what happened during Jesus' last meal with his disciples. And I am so glad that John did this because if he hadn't there would be all sorts of things we wouldn't have known about that evening. We wouldn't have known that Jesus washed his disciple's feet (something Barry talked about two weeks ago), and we wouldn't have known that Jesus said, 'I am the vine, and you are the branches' the verses Barry talked about last week. I can't even imagine not knowing about these things. And I am particularly thankful that John gave us what we find in chapter 17 because chapter 17 is John's record of the very last words Jesus said before he was arrested and went to the cross... Let's all turn to John 17 together and look at Jesus' last words...

This entire chapter, every bit of Chapter 17 is a heartfelt prayer... and it makes sense to me that Jesus would stop and pray at this moment during that evening because in the moments right before he started praying, two things had happened: first, he'd actually been talking to his disciples about prayer... and what he told them was something like this, 'When you pray, if you tell God you are coming in my name, he'll listen and he'll give you what you are asking for! So, from now on, when you pray, use my name!' And the second thing that happened was that the disciples, as a group, said that they finally understood what he was talking about! They'd said straight up, 'At last you are speaking plainly, and we understand!' And I'm here to tell you that this hadn't happened very often. My thinking is that when Jesus realized that they understood what he was saying to them about prayer he couldn't help but break out in prayer himself... break out into what I believe was in essence, a prayer of thanksgiving, thanksgiving that after 3 years of teaching them and living with them, his disciples were finally getting it! And this thanksgiving prayer starts in verse 1 of chapter 17 where we read *After saying all these things, Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come..."* Now, Jewish prayer at that time was generally done standing up, arms out, eyes open looking upward and out loud. We don't know all the specifics about this evening, but we do know that they'd been having a special meal together and that would have meant that they were all reclining at a low table... what this means is that they would have been lying down on the floor on their left sides with their feet away from the table, leaning on their left elbows and eating with their right hands. Now, to be honest, we don't know if Jesus stood up to pray, but it was Jewish custom that he would, and we are told that he was looking up toward the heavens and he was praying out loud... so it makes sense to me that he was standing for this prayer. And boy did he pray! But to be honest, some people have told me that what he prays here is difficult for them to follow. And I get this. It is true that some of Jesus' words here can seem a bit disorganized, even confusing, at first. But let's think about the situation for a minute: first, Jesus knew that he was about to be arrested, tried, and crucified... in maybe just an hour or so... so, it shouldn't surprise us that he wasn't thinking about crafting a beautiful prayer. It makes perfect sense to me that he would pray straight from his gut about the things that were weighing the most heavily on his mind in the heat of **that** moment. And the first thing on his mind, the first thing he wanted to be clear about was his relationship with his father. Look at what he says, *Father, the hour has come...* and don't think 60 minutes here... this 'hour' he is talking about includes everything that was going to happen to

him that very night...his betrayal, trial, crucifixion and death. He'd actually been talking to his disciples about this 'hour' a lot over the last few weeks and now it was all going to happen that evening! The 'hour' had come! But then he says this, '*Glorify your Son so he can give glory back to you.*'² *For you have given him authority over everyone. He gives eternal life to each one you have given him.*' Now, first we are going to have to get use to Jesus talking about himself in the third person. Granted, this sounds unusual to us, but that is the way Jesus often spoke.

But with that said, this is an interesting statement by Jesus. Notice what he said: 'My father gave me authority over everyone'... and he also said, 'My father will give eternal life to everyone that he's given to me' Now these verses have led to all sorts of scholarly fussing: some say that even though Jesus has authority over everyone, this is proof that only certain people were given to Jesus by his father and that only those certain people will be given eternal life; others say it's just the opposite; since God gave authority over everyone to Jesus then essentially everyone belongs to Jesus and everyone will get eternal life... and boy, do these folks go at it over these two completely opposite understandings of these words from Jesus. Well, I'm going to give you a Tim Ayers thought on this... and it's just my thinking so take it for what it's worth... and my thinking is that John realized that there was a possibility of confusion over what Jesus said here and so after he carefully quoted Jesus in those first two verses he added what almost every scholar I have ever encountered says is an editorial aside. John added his own editorial comments all the time in his gospel, by the way, and he always did it to clear up any confusions people might have about things Jesus said. And I think verse three is a clarifying statement added by John and he tells us this: 'Oh, by the way, *And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth.*' Now, I know that it reads like Jesus is still praying, but this is the same way John makes things clearer in a good number of other places in his gospel. And let's be honest, Jesus didn't need to tell God how people can come to have eternal life! I firmly believe that John has added this verse to tell us that you don't get eternal life because you were one of a small group of people picked by God and given to Jesus and you don't get eternal life simply because Jesus has authority over everyone. The way to eternal life is to know God and to know Jesus the one God sent to earth. And here's my editorial addition: that's the end of the story, so, let's stop the fussing about this! Okay? Let's just be about introducing people Jesus and his father!'

And once John has cleared this up, he goes back to Jesus' prayer: *4 I brought glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.* *5 Now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began.* What Jesus prayed here is essentially, 'Father, I've done everything you told me to do... so, it's time for you to bring me home.' I can see why Jesus prayed this. He was ready for THIS HOUR to pass so he could get to the **next** hour... because he knew that the **next** hour was going to be an unending 'hour' of being back home with his father! I get wanting that!

Then Jesus begins to pray specifically for his disciples. In fact, the next 14 verses are all prayer for his disciples... all of disciples except for Judas who had already left and was on his way to betray Jesus. And he starts out by telling his father that his disciples are finally getting it. Listen to verse six. *6 "I have revealed you to the ones you gave me from this world. They were always yours. You gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ('Kept' here means held on to)* *7 Now they know that everything I have is a gift from you,* *8 for I have passed on to them the message you gave me. They accepted it and know that I came from you, and they believe you sent me."* It must have been such a relief for Jesus to be able to tell his father this great news! 'Father, after 3 years, they finally understand things!' And then Jesus goes on to pray some very specific

things for his disciples and I'm just going to paraphrase all that he asks in the next 11 verses: Jesus asks God to protect his disciples once he has returned to his father; he asks that God will continue to give his disciples joy because the world will hate them; Jesus asks that God will make his disciples 'holy' by teaching them His truth and His word; Finally he asks that God be with them as they are sent out into the world... and he adds, sent out into the world to be a sacrifice just like he is about to be a sacrifice! Now, just think for a minute if you were one of the disciples. You're lying on your side looking up at Jesus as he stands over you with his arms out and his eyes open looking up to heaven and you've just heard him pray for you... and what he's prayed is that he's leaving and you're going to need protection... that you'll be hated... that you still have a lot to learn... and that you are going to be sent to who-knows-where in the world to be a sacrifice! It's no wonder John remembered what Jesus prayed that evening. I can see all the disciples looking at one another with a 'Did you hear that?' look on their faces. I'm sure they remembered Jesus' prayer because it probably scared them! But, just as an aside, if you read the book of Acts and the letters written some of these disciples wrote, you'll find that all of these prayers were answered: you'll find that the disciples were protected during dangerous moments; you'll see them filled with joy in the midst of being hated; you will see how deeply God revealed his truth to them and it will be obvious that no matter where God sent them He was with them... even when they were facing death for following Jesus. I think that's important to know!

But Jesus wasn't done praying; he still had some other people to pray for that evening... you and me... listen to what Jesus prayed for us starting in verse 20, ²⁰ *"I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. ²¹ I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. ²² "I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. ²³ I am in them, and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me. ²⁴ Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began!* Can I just say how telling it is to me that right before Jesus goes to the cross, in the moments before he heads out into the night to be betrayed, arrested, tried, condemned, whipped and crucified the one thing he asked God to do for us... for those of us who now believe because of the message the disciples gave to the world... is that we will be one.. that we will experience such perfect unity that the world can't help but know that God loves them as much as he loves Jesus. Okay. I'm just saying... last week Barry talked about the oneness that Jesus was speaking of here. My suggestion is if you haven't heard his sermon, you find some time to listen to what he had to say. All I can say at this point is that I know why Jesus prayed this and I'm unsure that this prayer has ever been fully answered... and the reason it hasn't been fully answered is that we Christians just haven't generally been on board with this kind of unity... at least not very often. Can I be honest for a minute? This subject... the unity of the Church... big C... haunts me. I've been in church leadership for about 40 years... mostly here at Grace, but at other churches before Grace started... and 'unified' has never been a word that I would have used to describe the wider Christian community anywhere I have been. There has always been a competition of some sort between congregations, a who-is-winning-and-who-isn't thing that has almost nothing to do with showing the world that God sent Jesus and that God loves others as much as he loves Jesus. I'm just saying. Bottom line, the number of people attending church or even connected to a church both here in our community and in communities all over America is shrinking... we aren't bringing people to Jesus... we're just passing fewer and fewer people

around... and this grieves me. About all I can say is that I don't want to be a part of the problem and I don't want us to be a part of the problem. My prayer is that Jesus' prayer will be answered in and through this congregation... that we will, to paraphrase Jesus' prayer here, that we will *'experience such perfect unity that when those in the world, those that so need the light and life that Jesus offers, when they see us they will know that God sent Jesus and that He loves them as much as God loves Jesus.'* And my hope is that we can somehow find ways to help answer Jesus' prayer... that we, in every possible way, will be one just as Jesus and his father are one.

The final words of Jesus' prayer are a bit of a summary of all that he has prayed up to this point. I can feel Jesus taking a deep breath and pausing for a moment, then slowly praying, *"O righteous Father, the world doesn't know you, but I do; and these disciples know you sent me."* ²⁶ *I have revealed you to them, and I will continue to do so. Then your love for me will be in them, and I will be in them."* Now, one quick note at this point. The word 'disciples' is not in the original Greek of this verse... it simply says ... 'and these know you sent me.' And here's what I've been thinking. Again, this is just me. I know that God sent Jesus... **and** I've learned a lot about God by listening to Jesus and I'm sure a lot of you have, too... so, I don't see any reason not to count myself in with the 'these' Jesus is talking about here. He was just praying for us anyway. And what these final words tell me is something that I am certain will resonate with many of you. Now I know that much of what John talks about in his gospel is, 'Where do you stand with Jesus?' we've said many times in this series that much of what John has written is intended to make us say whether we are 'in' with Jesus, or not! But what John tells us here, in the very last words of the last prayer of Jesus before he is betrayed, is that Jesus made a decision as well. When he said this to his father, *I have revealed you to them, and I will continue to do so. Then your love for me will be in them, and I will be in them,"* it was a statement of commitment to you and to me... we are these 'thems,' if you will. He said without any reservations that he **is all in** with us... that he would continue to reveal God to us and that he would be, and get this now, **In us!** And what makes this all the more powerful is that the tense of these words in the original language tells us that Jesus was committing from that moment onward into the future, as in **forever**, committing to continue to both reveal his father to us and be with us in a supernatural way that can only be described as 'in us.' I think this is important for us to know. Once we've made the decision to be all in with him... to be a disciple of Jesus... we can rest in the assurance that he has already committed himself to us through a promise he made to his father, who just happens to be the God of the Universe. Here is a truth you can hold on to: Jesus has been committed to you since before the moment he set things in motion to create this world and he will be committed to you for all of eternity future... he has committed to be one with you just as he is one with his father. And I think this is good news... it's really good news... it's encouraging and reassuring and life giving and worth telling the world that in Jesus' last moments before he went to the cross he was praying for you and for me... praying that we would be united and promising his Father in Heaven that he would remain committed to us, faithful to us, forever. And he is faithful. He will never let us go... he has promised to be with us and in us... and to live through us in ways that shouts this message from earlier in John's gospel to our very needy world: *This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be defeated by the brokenness of the world; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again and tell the world that anyone who trusts in Jesus is set free to find new life. John 3:16-18a.*

And can I add one more Tim Editorial: that is a message worth sharing!