

THE PRAYER FOR UNITY

John 17:20-26

Introduction: The last hours that Jesus had with His disciples before He went to the cross ended in a prayer meeting. Jesus did the praying, the subject of His prayer was His disciples and those who should believe on Him through His disciples (us). The prayer has been described as a "planning meeting" between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, to which we are privileged to listen. In these last verses we find described the blueprints of God's program for our age. His objective, His strategy, and His tactics.

I. GOD'S OBJECTIVE (v21, 23, Jn 3:16)

- It is so easy for us to forget that we were once part of this world, for we have become so taken up with what God is doing to us as believers, that we sometimes forget that He is still aiming beyond us. We seem to feel that God's program stops with us, and that His entire purpose in coming into the world and leaving by the cross and the resurrection is to get US to heaven without any difficulty.

- However, it is clear from the scriptures that the Lord does not intend it this way. He leaves us here in order that we may learn how to share in the painful process of drawing a struggling, rebellious creation unto Himself. We must become a part of God's process of reaching the world.

- The church is left here in order that the lost world may become convinced:
 - That Jesus Christ is the authentic voice of God.
 - That He is the authoritative utterance of what God intends to do in human affairs.
 - That He is the key to world history and reality, the revelation of the invisible God and therefore the only way from man to God.
- When the world becomes convinced of this, the rest is up to them. Our task is not to save the world. Our job is to bring it to an awareness of who Jesus is, and when men and women come to that awareness they will do one of two things:
 - They will either accept Jesus and be saved, or:
 - They will reject Him and continue in the lost condition in which the whole world exists.
- **"Evangelism is the attempt to give every man/woman an opportunity to make an intelligent choice of whether to receive or reject Jesus Christ."**
- Evangelism is not an attempt to save the world except as that is involved in the acceptance of Christ, nor to condemn the world except as that is involved in the rejection of Jesus Christ.
 - **The whole thrust of God's purpose in human history is simply to bring men/women to an awareness of who Jesus Christ is...**
- Christians must not isolate themselves from the world - that is the very thing we are here to reach.
 - We are not to fill up a ship and go cruising in the Caribbean and listen each morning to a Bible teacher giving prophetic messages..
 - The church exists in order to reach the world as God's instrument.

II. GOD'S STRATEGY (v21, 23)

- **"...that they may become perfectly one..."**
- Is this prayer really unanswered today? Has God waited 20 centuries to fulfill this request of Jesus?
No! This prayer has been answered ever since the Day of Pentecost.

- The business of making Christians does not depend upon us. It depends upon the Spirit of God. That's why He came.
- All Christians are one, not in union, but in **unity**. Union is an outward agreement, an alliance, formed by the putting aside differences, creating one big structure. That is not unity.
- **Unity is the sharing of a life!**
- The divine strategy the Lord intends to use to bring the world to an awareness of Jesus Christ is to create in the midst of the world a family. A family that is so filled with joy and warmth that the world will envy it and like a homeless orphan press their noses up against the window, longing to join the warmth and the fellowship of the family circle.

When the church is like this, there is no more powerful evangelistic witness!

- Here is God's divine strategy: To make all Christians share one life in one great family and so make the world, starving for meaningful personal relationships, simply to drool with desire.

III. GOD'S TACTIC (v26)

- God's tactic is **love!** The unity of the church is visible when Christians love one another.
- The reason for the failure of the church to reach the world today is lack of love. Churches fight among themselves, among denominations, name calling, heresy hunting, etc....
- No wonder the world has turned a deaf ear to the church...
- Evangelism starts with **love for one another!** (1 Jn 5:2)
- What impression has our church made on this community?
- There are three essential qualities to genuine Christian love:
 - Mutual contact. Willingness to talk, no aloofness, no withdrawal from each other, no selectiveness, but love one another simply because we are Christians.
 - Mutual concern. Willingness to genuinely listen, readiness to help, to share, to pray, to bear one another's burdens.
 - Mutual sense of contribution. We need each other. You have what some else needs and they have what you need, thus we minister to each other alike.
- Every great spiritual awakening, large or small, thorough out the course of Christian history, always began by a breaking down of barriers between Christians, first of all. Long standing feuds resolved, apologies offered and accepted, confessions made, separations joined back together. Invariably revival came and the world sat up and took notice. **That is love: Contact, Concern, Contribution**
- One other thing. This love is not something we work up. It is given to us by Jesus Christ, **but** it does require our consent. The Lord is ready to love, when we are ready to let ourselves be that channel of love.

"Father, thou art the God of love. When we look at the cross of our Lord Jesus, we see that love poured out for us. What remarkable love that is, love that will not let us go, love that pursues us despite our rebuffs, love that never gives up, relentless in its pursuit until we yield, broken, melted by thy love. Lord, this is the nature and character of the love that is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us. It is this remarkable thing that eh world waits to see in Christian people. It is the abence of this, Father, that makes them turn away from our doors, uninterested, disappointed. Lord teach us then to love one another. Whatever this may mean in terms of our personal circumstances, teach us, Father to love one another. We pray in Christ's name, Amen."