

Exalting Jesus Christ

"When Jesus Prayed for You"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. As the armies of Alexander the Great swept toward world domination, one important conquest was the city of Jerusalem.
 - A. The citizens of the city waited in terror, well aware of the might and power of Alexander's army and the trail of blood and destruction it left in its wake.
 1. The Jewish historian Josephus tells about that moment when the Jews of Jerusalem came face-to-face with the Greeks.
 - a. Outside the walls of the ancient city stood the High Priest, adorned in His priestly robes, including the ornate headdress bearing the name of God on a golden plate.
 - b. Surrounding him were a number of other priests and some important dignitaries, all dressed in solid white robes.
 2. Unexpectedly, Alexander called his army to halt and he approached the high priest, intrigued not only by the man's office but also by the name he prominently displayed on his headdress.
 - a. The puzzled Alexander told the priest that he had dreamed of this very scene not long before.

3. From an old sheath, the priest drew out a well-worn scroll.
 - a. He showed Alexander the prophecy of Daniel, written well over two hundred years before.
 - b. It was a prophecy that foretold the defeat of the Persians by the Greeks, and that their leader would become great.
 - d. Alexander not only spared the city of Jerusalem from being pillaged, but treated the Jews with dignity from that day forward.
- B. Just as Alexander the Great saw himself in Daniel's prophecy, so we can see ourselves in the prayer of Jesus in John chapter 17.
 1. Jesus doesn't call us by name, but it's clear that He had each of us in mind.
 - a. **John 17:20** – *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word. . ."*
- C. And so, as we continue our series "Exalting Jesus Christ," we want to take a microscopic look at the last seven verses of John chapter seventeen.
 1. I want you to see how the Lord was thinking of you, "When Jesus Prayed for You."

- II. As we mentioned last week, prayer is an essential ingredient in the life of every Christian.
 - A. The New Testament is filled with admonitions concerning prayer.
 - 1. Concerning one of the many parables of Jesus we read:
 - a. **Luke 18:1** – *Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart. . .*
 - 2. The apostle Paul emphasized the importance of prayer:
 - a. **1 Timothy 2:1-2** – *Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.*
 - 3. In exhorting Christians to put on the whole armor of God, Paul also said:
 - a. **Ephesians 6:18** – *. . .praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit. . .*
 - 4. And finally James, the Lord's brother, added:
 - a. **James 4:2b** – *. . .you do not have because you do not ask.*
 - B. Since prayers express the deepest longings of our hearts, what was it that Jesus longed for in the last seven verses of His prayer in John chapter seventeen?

1. A closer look shows that Jesus obviously wanted you and I to become His disciples through the preaching and teaching of the apostles.
2. But once we become His disciples, we see that the Lord prayed for three very specific things – three things He longed to find in all who would claim Him as their Lord.
3. So, let's open our Bibles to the last seven verses of John chapter seventeen where we see the deepest longings of the Lord's heart concerning you and me.
4. And then, let's close the lesson by making some practical application of the things we read here.

BODY:

- I. To begin, it's rather obvious from this prayer of Jesus that He longed for you and I to be among those who believe in Him.
 - A. Jesus had just prayed for Himself and for His apostles – but now He turns His attention to you and me.
 1. **John 17:20** – *"I do not pray for these alone [the apostles], but also for those who will believe in Me through their word. . ."*
 2. It never ceases to amaze me when I hear people talk about believing in Jesus, only to discover that they have never read or

studied about Him in the writings of the apostles – the New Testament.

3. As we've said so many times before, faith and the Word of God are inseparable – we cannot have faith unless we spend time in God's Word.

a. **Romans 10:17** – *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

B. No one can have a proper faith or belief in Jesus Christ without hearing the word of God – without being exposed to the inspired writings of the apostles and prophets found in both the Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures.

1. The Old Testament is filled with prophecies concerning the coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of His kingdom.

2. And the New Testament shows the fulfillment of those prophecies.

3. But more than that, the New Testament is where we also discover the true nature and character of Jesus Christ.

4. The simple truth is that we can never come to Christ unless we come to Him through the Word.

a. It's through the words of the apostles – both written and spoken words – that we learn about God's plan of salvation.

b. And it's through the words of the apostles that we also learn how to live faithfully once we become a Christian.

C. So, when Jesus prayed "*for those who will believe in Me through their word,*" who was He praying for?

1. First, Jesus was praying for us to come to Him through the preaching and teaching of the apostles.
2. But after we have come to believe in Him through their word, there are three specific things Jesus wants for all His disciples – and it's these three things for which Jesus prayed in John chapter seventeen.

II. What three things did Jesus pray for?

A. First, Jesus prayed for unity among those who would believe in Him.

1. The next three verses shows how important unity is to Jesus.
 - a. Jesus prayed: **John 17:21-23** – . . .*that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.*
 - b. Four times in three verses Jesus prayed that we be one.

2. But included in His desire to see unity, Jesus first prayed for unity in two areas:
 - a. First, He prayed for unity of belief: **John 17:20-21a** – *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You. . ."*
 - (1). It's rather common to hear people say, "We're all children of God – the Bible says so!" Then they quote: **Galatians 3:26a** – *For you are all sons of God. . .*
 - (2). Unfortunately they don't read the rest of this verse nor the one that follows: **Galatians 3:26-27** – *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*
 - (3). The only way we can become "sons of God" (or children of God) is "through faith in Jesus Christ," and by being "baptized into Christ" where we "have put on Christ."
 - b. Not only did Jesus pray for unity of belief, Jesus also prayed for unity in glory: **John 17:22** – *"And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one. . ."*
 - (1). What does unity in glory mean?

- (2). Back in verses 6 and 8, Jesus spoke of giving His apostles two specific things – first, He revealed to them God's name, and second He gave them God's word:
 - (a). **John 17:6** – *"I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world."*
 - (b). **John 17:8** – *"For I have given to them the words which You have given Me. . ."*
 - (3). Jesus said the apostles would not only have God the Father as the source of power to Whom they could turn in time of need, they would also have God's holy and divine Word to guide them and to give us direction through life.
 - (4). When we depend on God for strength in time of need, and spend time in His Word, God is glorified.
 - (5). And, we also share in that glory because we have placed our faith and confidence in Him, and because we are also determined to remain faithful and obedient to His Word.
3. When we read this passage more closely, we discover why unity among believers in Christ is so critically important.
 - a. In fact, Jesus pointed out that there are two reasons why unity among His followers is so essential.

(1). **John 17:21** – . . .*that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.*

(2). **John 17:23** – . . .*that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.*

b. Unity among us as believers is how we convince the world that Jesus came from God, and that we are the recipients of God's love because we are all united in Him.

4. I think it's important to understand what Jesus was really praying for here.

a. His prayer was not a prayer for conformity – where we lose our own individual personalities, or where we all look the same, dress the same, and act the same.

b. Nor was His prayer a prayer for union – where we become a loosely formed group of believers with our own separate doctrines, beliefs, and systems of worship.

5. The prayer of Jesus was a prayer for unity – where there would be oneness of heart, oneness of faith, and a oneness of purpose.

a. Or as the apostle Paul put it: **1 Corinthians 1:10** – *Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no*

divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

6. How is this possible?
 - a. Jesus gave us the answer earlier in this same prayer: **John 17:17** – *Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.*
 - (1). There is only one kind of truth – God's truth.
 - (2). And the only place where God's truth can be found is in God's word.
 - b. The issues that divide people in the religious world – and even in the Lord's church – are due to two reasons and two reasons only.
 - (1). People either want to add to or take away from God's truth, or they don't understand God's truth and try to make God's truth fit their own beliefs.
 - (2). They either want to add their traditions and customs, or they intentionally or unintentionally twist the Scriptures to fit their own beliefs.
 - c. Peter warned about this when he spoke about how some of Paul's writings were difficult for some to understand, which: **2 Peter 3:16** – *. . .untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.*

d. And Paul warned that there will always be some, who:

1 Timothy 1:7 – . . . *desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.*

7. The religious world is filled with people who twist the Scriptures because they fancy themselves teachers of the law, but don't know what they're talking about.

8. And, unfortunately, the same is true even within the body of Christ.

9. Therefore, the only way we can be united – the only way we can be one as the Father and the Son are one:

a. Is for each and every one of us to be thoroughly acquainted with God's truth found in God's Word.

b. And for each of us to handle the Word of God correctly.

B. Second, Jesus not only prayed for unity, He also prayed for our destiny.

1. He prayed we would someday be with Him in heaven: **John 17:24**

– *"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."*

2. But how can we be sure – how can we be certain that heaven will be our home?

a. The answer is simply this: our assurance is based on the fact that God gave us to Jesus.

- b. When we obeyed the gospel and were baptized for the remission of our sins, the Bible tells us two things happened.
- (1). First, God purchased us, or redeemed us, from Satan through the blood of Christ: **1 Peter 1:18-19** – . . . *knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*
 - (2). And second, we were then added by the Lord to His church: **Acts 2:47** – *And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*
- c. We belong to Jesus Christ. In fact, the apostle Paul explained it this way:
- (1). **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** – *Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*
- d. Therefore, since we belong to Jesus Christ, all He asks us to do in return is simply remain faithful.
- (1). **2 Corinthians 5:9-10** – *Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. 10*

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

(2). **2 Timothy 4:7-8** – *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

(3). **Revelation 2:10** – *Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

e. You can rest assured that Jesus wants you to be with Him in heaven.

C. And finally, Jesus prayed not that we simply love one another, but that we love one another as He and the Father love one another.

1. Notice how Jesus describes the perfect relationship between Himself and the Father, and uses that relationship as a model for the kind of love we must have for one another.

a. **John 17:25-26** – *"O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. 26 And I have declared to them Your name,*

and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

- b. It's really a very simple illustration:
 - (1). The Father loves the Son.
 - (2). The Son loves us.
 - (3). Therefore, we are to love one another in the same way as the Father loves the Son.
2. There's a very simple reason why we need to truly love one another:
 - a. **1 John 4:7** – *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.*
3. However, our love for one another is not just a passive kind of love. We're told:
 - a. **1 Peter 1:22** – *Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart. . .*
 - b. Our love for one another must be "*fervent*" – sincere and intense – which can only come out of a "*pure heart*" – a heart that is free from envy, pride or any ill will.
4. That's obviously a big challenge.

5. But Jesus prayed that our love for one another will be modeled by God's love for Him.

III. Let's close by making some practical applications of this prayer to our own lives.

A. There are three specific applications that emerge from these last seven verses of John 17. These three applications relate to the three things Jesus prayed for.

1. First, to grow in unity sometimes means *giving in*.
 - a. It means we're not going to allow ourselves to get hung up in trivial disagreements or fuss over matters of opinion.
 - b. Those who enjoy fellowship in the deepest sense of the word have learned that we're all still growing in our faith and in our understanding of God's word.
 - c. Therefore, we've learned to give our brother or sister in Christ time to grow and mature as well.
 - d. We may still have some disagreements among us, but we can disagree respectfully while we continue to work toward a common belief.
2. Second, to know and reach our destiny requires *giving up*.

- a. We will never make it to heaven on the basis of our own goodness – simply because our goodness will never be good enough to make up for all the wrong we've done in the past.
 - b. While you are to *"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"* (**Philippians 2:12**) by knowing and doing the Lord's will, you also need to remember it's, *"by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."* (**Ephesians 2:8**).
 - c. No matter how hard you try to *"work out your own salvation"* you will fall short sooner or later.
 - d. Therefore, we need to learn to place our trust and confidence in God's saving grace to make up where we have failed.
 - e. In the end, we need to *give up* trying to earn our way to heaven, and leave that to God's grace and mercy.
3. And finally, to show God's love requires us to *give out* by freely sharing that love with others.
 - a. God doesn't simply *tell* us He loves us, He *shows* us: **Romans 5:8** – *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
 - b. In the same manner, we need to demonstrate God's love by the way we act toward others.

- c. If "*God so love the world that He gave His only begotten Son*" (**John 3:16**), then we need to show our love for the world by telling them about God's only begotten Son.

CONCLUSION:

- I. The death of Alexander the Great was as *tragic* as his life was *remarkable*.
 - A. He died at the age of thirty-three as an alcoholic with no more worlds to conquer.
 - 1. When he looked into the Scriptures that day outside the city of Jerusalem, he caught a glimpse of himself.
 - 2. But the glory of personal triumph outshone the glory of God in his eyes, and his moment of clear understanding never blossomed into a lifetime of commitment to the God of heaven and earth.
 - 3. Perhaps this is why James tells us:
 - a. **James 1:22-24** – *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.*
 - B. Don't be an Alexander.
 - 1. Don't be someone who takes a passing glance into the mirror of God's Word.

2. Instead, look diligently into the Word of God and allow it to change you for the better.
 3. Or, as James put it:
 - a. **James 1:25** – *But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.*
- C. What do you see when you look into the mirror of God's Word.
1. Do you see someone who needs to come to Christ in obedience of the gospel – someone who needs to be baptized into Christ for the remission of your past sins?
 2. Or, do you see someone who has allowed the cares and worries of this world and its temptations to interfere with your relationship with Jesus Christ?
 3. If you see yourself either way, then come now and let us help you to address your greatest need.