

## **Why does it hurt so much?**

Have you ever noticed that it seems to hurt so much more when it is the church that hurts you? That when people are selfish, or bullies or just ignorant of our feelings in the church, it just seems to sting more, than when we face those things outside the church? Have you ever wondered why that is?

Or why when you hear about a church or Christian organisation that has hurt people in some way – they're being hateful, they're being ignorant – you hear about that – and your heart just sinks – it feels awful!

We live in a world full of people who make horrible selfish decisions, that hurt people every single day – so why does it sting so much more when it happens in the church?

To a certain extent – we rationalise it when it happens – after all we're only human, we all make mistakes – but that doesn't stop it hurting, and it certainly doesn't stop it hurting more because it is the church.

As we come to John 17, we come to a part of the Bible where Jesus shares his deep desires for his church – for the disciples there with him, and also those who would come to believe in him. He also reveals the deep truth of our relationships in the church, and it is that truth that will help us understand why it hurts so much in the church, but even more importantly, it is that truth that will guide us as we seek to be God's church in this world.

*Dear Lord,*

*I thank you that John was able to record these amazing words of Jesus, that we may take great encouragement from them. I pray that as I explain these truths, that your Spirit will be working through my words, and through the hearts and minds of those here, that we may all know the depths of our relationship with you, and what you hope and desire for us here today.*

*Amen.*

## **The Final Words**

This is the moment. In John 17 we arrive at the point that all of John has been looking forward to – “Father the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your

Son may glorify you” The time has come for Jesus, in just a few short hours, Jesus will be arrested, then tried, then put to death on a Roman Cross. And in this moment of seeming shame and devastation, Jesus says that this is the time for his glory. In this moment, the Father will proclaim for the world to see that Jesus is the Son of God. The hour has come. As the Son is glorified, so too will he finish the work that the Father sent him to do – as Jesus dies, and rises back to life again three days later, eternal life will come. Eternal life for all who know Jesus, who know the Son, and through the Son, know the father. Life forever without pain and without sin, for all those who believe in Jesus.

This is a big moment. The hour for the Son’s Glory has come indeed.

Jesus knows the road ahead, and he has explained to the disciples what is about to happen – as best as they could understand at least – so what does he do in this moment in John 17 – in these final words before he completes the work of his Father? What does the Son do in these short minutes before the hour of his glorification?

### **The Final Prayer**

In this moment – Jesus prays for his disciples, his followers who have believed and followed him, where so many have turned away –

V9 I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.

In this moment, in this calm before the storm, Jesus prays for his disciples, those that he loves and cares for, that are of such value to him. Those who the Father has entrusted to him, that the Father took out of the world, and have brought to Jesus. Those who have heard the words that the Father gave to Jesus, and have accepted them, that have believed them, and have obeyed them. Jesus takes this final moment, before the Cross, to pray for them. But why pray for them? What is about to come that they need prayer for?

V11 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you.

Jesus is leaving this world – as he enters this hour of his glory, he knows that it also marks the end of his time with his disciples – it marks the end of the time

when he can teach them face to face and when he can physically be there to protect them from the world and all of its threats. They need prayer, they need to know the truth of what comes next – that even as Jesus leaves that they will still be in his care and love.

But there is a particular purpose that Jesus has in mind for his prayer, read on with me from verse 11

Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.

### **Unity for the Disciples**

Jesus prays for their protection so that they may be one as we are one – Jesus desires that the disciples will have the same unity that he and the Father share – that as the Father and the Son are one – the disciples will be one in the same way.

So in the same way that the Father and the Son love each other – the disciples are to be united in love. That same love which is poured out continually in every action by the Father for the Son, and by the Son for the Father, that same sort of love is to be displayed in the lives of the disciples for each other. They have been commanded already to love one another as Jesus loved them, but this goes even further beyond that – they need to love one another as the Father and the Son love each other.

Similarly, as the Father and the Son have the same purpose to bring glory to the Son and the Father, the disciples are to be united in the same purpose of bringing many to know the truth of Jesus.

And that unity is so precious to Jesus. That is the core of his prayer. They need to be protected by the power of the Father, so they can be united like the father and the son.

The need protection – because as verse 14 says the world which hates them will bring much pain and struggle, as the disciples do not belong to the world as Jesus did not belong to the world– and that pain and struggle of being in the world but not of the world – threatens the unity – threatens their need to be united in love and purpose for one another.

They need protection – because as verse 15 says, as long as they remain in the world, the evil one, Satan, the devil, will do whatever he can to try and divide and destroy that unity the disciples have.

That unity in love and purpose is so vital to the ongoing work of the disciples, and so valuable and precious as they are in a world that they don't belong to. But they have an important mission to carry out to the world.

V18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world

They have been sent into the world, to bring that truth which sanctifies and makes eternal life known to all – the truth about Jesus Christ. That is their mission, that is their goal, and their ongoing unity, being one with each other as the Father and Son are one with each, is essential to them carrying out their task.

### **Unity for Us**

And so, as Jesus knows that as they go out as one into the world with the truth of the gospel, he not only prays for the disciples, but also prays for those who will believe in him through that truth, as a result of their unity, from verse 20

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.

Jesus extends his prayer from earlier to those who will believe through the work of the disciples – which is us! We have their message of the gospel preserved for us faithfully through time in the Bible, so we have come to believe in Jesus through that unity and mission of the disciples. And so Jesus prays for us – that we would also have that same unity – that all of us may be one – just as the Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father, so we are to be united.

Just as he prayed that the disciples would be united in the same love and purpose that he shares with the Father, he prays that same prayer for us!

On some level this is not a new idea – after all last week we heard that Jesus is the vine, and we are all branches from that vine, of course we should be united together in church, because that is just the spiritual reality of things, we are all

individually in Jesus by faith, so of course we are united. But what is significant here is the purpose behind the unity for all believers, from verse 22

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— 23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Through the glory given by Jesus, the message of the gospel which reveals the glory of who the Son is, and what he has done for us, Jesus will bring us to unity just as the Father and the Son are unified.

We will be unified so that the world will know who Jesus is, that they may believe that he is the Messiah and Christ come to save, and so that the world may know the love of the Father.

Our unity has a purpose – our unity defined by shared love and purpose, modelled to us by the relationship between the Father and the Son – has an intended purpose of witnessing the truth of the gospel to the world.

If you have been searching and searching for the truth about Jesus, the truth about God, what this passage says to you, is that you will see it, in the unity of the church – in the love of the believers of Christ for each other.

You may want a divine revelation, for Jesus to reveal himself in the flesh to you right now, but what Jesus says here is that if you want to know Jesus, he is making himself continually known to you right now, in the unity of the Church.

In the love and oneness of the church, you will see Christ, you will see the Father's love. My hope and prayer is that you will experience that in our church family today – and that your heart and mind will be ready to see and accept the truth about Jesus.

The glory of Jesus, achieved shortly after this prayer in John 17, is revealed to the world by the unity of the followers of Christ. It must be seen, it must be physical, it has to be a real tangible thing. The world should look at the church, and see such a vivid display of united love and purpose, that they see Christ.

Our unity as a church is so important to Jesus, and so it must be important to us. And so let us pursue that complete unity – that unity which Jesus earnestly prays for us to attain.

As a starting place – lets do as Jesus does – and commit ourself to praying for that unity. This is something the Father and the Son desires so much for his followers – so let us pray earnestly and regularly that Jesus will help us to love one another like the Father and the Son love one another. Pray that out of our love for one another, we may be a powerful witness to Eastwood.

And then lets get on with doing what Jesus wants us to do – to grow in unity together. Lets not make excuses, lets not delay, lets love each other, as Jesus wants us to do. Let us not squander the opportunities we have as a church to be a powerful display of who Christ is, to display the love of the Father in our love for each other. We have been sent into the world, and we have so many opportunities to share the truth of Jesus with the world as we pursue that unity.

Recently we have been seeing so many new people coming to our church – we have an amazing opportunity to display this great community of love that Christ wants us to have, and through that love, for them to know Christ. So lets do that! Lets love them, let us welcome them into our church family, let us be prepared to open our lives to them, to share the love of Christ with them. People shouldn't leave our church just having had a nice time – they should leave our church having experienced a reflection of God's love that points them to Jesus! That's just one of the opportunities we have as a church to display the complete unity we have – and I'm sure you can think of many others across all the ministries we as a church to do in the world, in Eastwood. How can you take hold of all the opportunities you have to love, to actively live out that spiritual unity we have?

And lets not remove that unity and love, over the sake of perceived differences. As different Christians, as different Christian churches, and as different Christian denominations, we put aside the cause of love because of those differences. Sometimes we will personally disagree with people, that is inevitable, and sometimes it is necessary. Sometimes it is even good! But those differences are not cause to put aside the unity we have in Christ. Christ has

given us the glory given to him so that we may be one – he has revealed himself to be the divine Son of God, so we may be one. We can still, and we should still love people – even if we disagree with them. As long as we all celebrate that one truth, that in Jesus we may know God and know eternal life, we have cause to love. Now let me be clear – that unity does not mean that we always have to work together, the unity does not mean that we always have to agree, the unity does not mean that we cannot critique and correct. The truth of the gospel, and the unity we have, means that in those moments, we must first pursue love. We must pursue love that is a reflection of that same love the Father and Son have for each other – a humble, sacrificial love, that seeks good for others. In some cases, the thing we do to love may need to be reminding them of the truth of the gospel, so that we may continue to pursue our unity.

Sometimes we are so quick to judge, so quick to rebuke, but we need to be slow to judge, and quick to love. When we have a disagreement about how a ministry or church programme should be run – be slow to judge and quick to love. The way we think about and talk about Christians outside our own church – whether in other Anglican churches, or Baptists, or Uniting, or Hillsong – be slow to judge and quick to love. When we feel ourselves being drawn into a debate on social media – be slow to judge and quick to love. So don't use those differences as an excuse to talk down to those you are different to – to gossip, to slander, to belittle. Don't use those differences to harbour grudges and bitterness. That is not what Jesus wants for his people. That is not the unity that he so very much desires.

This is why it hurts so much when the church hurts us. It hurts so much because it is such a betrayal of that unity which we should have – a unity which should be a reflection of the relationship between the Father and the Son. It hurts because it is a betrayal of the spiritual unity we have in Christ with each other, but also because it is a betrayal of the active unity in love and purpose Jesus so much wants us to have. It hurts because when we are hurt by the church, or someone else is hurt, an opportunity for the truth about Jesus and the Father's love is lost.

There are so many things that threaten the unity of the church. Jesus wants to protect that precious unity. He wants us to be united, to be brought to

complete unity in love for each other, just as he and the father are one, so we should be one. So let us take hold of that one desire for our church, and earnestly desire that we may be a church with complete unity – so that the world may know that Jesus is the Son, and in him, they may know eternal life. Let us not by our action or inaction damage that vital unity. Instead, lets imagine what a difference we could make as a church if we could reflect the unity of the Father and the Son, in all of its oneness and complete love for each other, and the gospel impact we could have on the world we live in, that Christ has sent us into.