

Explore: Honor Jesus

December 30, 2013

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Jan. 12 focuses on John 17.*

It is incredible to know the God of the universe prayed for us. Have you ever had a person in your life you went to when you needed someone to pray for you? The reason you went to them was because you could count on them to follow through with their commitment to pray. And, if you were honest, you would say you believed God listened to them more than most of us.

I say that ‘tongue-in-cheek’ of course, but I certainly felt that way about my mom. While she was here on this earth, she was a true prayer warrior, and everyone we knew called on her to be in prayer when there was a need in their lives.

The awesome truth is you do not have to wonder about the prayer we have here in John 17, this is a prayer from Almighty God to Almighty God, so you know this one was answered by God. There is way too much information here for us to cover in one short lesson, so I want to focus on only three main aspects of this prayer.

Same page

Jesus stated in several places in Scripture that he wanted his disciples to have his joy and to have it all—not just a little bit of his joy. There is something interesting about the way Jesus says it here in this particular text. In verse 13, Jesus again mentioned he wanted his disciples to have the “full measure” of his joy. Then, in verse 14, he went on to say his disciples were hated by the world. From one perspective, that connection seems strange. How can your life be full on joy if there are people all around you who hate you?

This idea brings us to a bigger picture we need to be able to see. Have you ever had an experience where you felt like you were in the dark about what was going on and then someone came along and shed a little light on the situation? Perhaps you were driving and trying to find a certain location based on a friend's directions, but they left out one little detail that threw the whole thing off.

The truth is, Jesus wants us to have a life of incredible joy, but as long as we are looking at things from the world's perspective, we never really will understand what he wants. We can be hated by the world, have far less money than our neighbors, even be fighting some major illness in our lives, yet still have great joy in our hearts. The only way for this to happen, however, is for us to be sure we are on the same page with God. As long as his approval is all we are seeking and we are receiving our satisfaction from his presence in our lives, we are going to know Joy. Jesus prayed this would be true in our lives—therefore, it will be so.

Being one

Another incredible part of Christ's prayer for both his immediate disciples as well as ourselves is that we be united. I still find this amazing. If it were up to us, there would be many other things we would pray for before we got around to praying for unity among believers. And yet, this is about all Jesus asked the Father. Therefore, it must be very important.

God wants us to be in such close union with him that we are considered "one with God." We should live each day in the light and joy of his presence—worshipping him and allowing him to guide and direct our lives. The other half of that coin is we also would be one with our fellow believers. Ideally, you would be able to say this is easy. If I am in perfect union with God, and you are in perfect union with God, then we should be united with each other as well.

However, we live in the real world, and we know none of us is perfect. So, it is important for us to remember great encouragements from Scripture, such as: “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires” (James 1:19-20).

Jesus is not saying we are going to agree on everything all the time. That is not the point. As we have discussed before, God has put us together—with all our different personalities and perspectives—on purpose. What Christ is praying for here is our faith would be the thing that allows us to work together in God’s love to build each other up and accomplish God’s will here on earth. Our unity matters, and it was an important part of Christ’s prayer.

One with a purpose

Finally, I believe it is important to see that Jesus had something beyond our own comfort and peace in mind when he prayed for our unity. He wanted us to be united “so that the world may believe” (v. 21). This makes our willingness to work well with each other much more important.

Our ability to love our fellow believers has a tremendous effect on our ability to reach this world for Christ. I believe we fail to see this truth many times over in our churches today. There are many reasons for us to be “one” with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We need to encourage each other’s faith, help each other overcome obstacle and challenge one another to live fully for Christ.

Ultimately, we have to see the truth for which Christ prayed here: We need to be united with one another in order to share God’s love with the world around us. Whatever minor frictions we might have with each other, they pale in comparison to this greater goal of winning the lost and dying world

to our Savior. Hopefully, keeping this truth in mind can help us stay on track in our relationships with our fellow believers.

Again, these are just some of the ideas for which Jesus spent time in prayer the night he was arrested in the garden. Our Savior, our Lord, prayed these truths would be accomplished in our lives.

Now would be a good time for us to pray as well. Let's agree with Christ to be on the same page with him, to be united with our brothers and sisters in Christ and to be more concerned about those who could die apart from Christ than about our own desires within our relationships.