

Heiligman: Let's pray Jesus' prayer—for unity

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The last night before his death on a cross, Jesus didn't make reservations at his favorite restaurant in Jerusalem. He didn't go out and paint the town red. He didn't finalize his last will and testament. He didn't glance at his bucket list, wondering what he could check off.



Jim Heiligman

The last night before the pain, agony and shame of the cross, Jesus spent time in prayer.

After praying for himself, Jesus prayed for his disciples with him in the upper room. John records the prayer for us: "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" (John 17:11).

But beyond that, Jesus saw the future and prayed for the world church for all the ages yet to come.

On that night, when the Son of God would be betrayed by, of all people, one of his followers; on that night, when the Son of God would be arrested and

falsely tried in a kangaroo court; on that night, when the Son of God would be mocked and ridiculed and beaten without the slightest thought of mercy; on that night, Jesus prayed for your congregation and mine.

Jesus prayed for us

What he prayed for his disciples, he also prayed for you and me. “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” (John 17:20).

In this prayer, Jesus asked only for one thing—that all of his followers be one.

Jesus did not pray for the church’s numerical strength. He didn’t pray for its financial stability. He didn’t pray for its buildings. He didn’t pray for its worldly visibility. What he prayed for in that upper room as the cross ominously loomed on the horizon was for his church to be united. More than anyone else who had gone before him or who would come after him, he knew unity would ensure the victory of the church’s mission in the world.

Unity with purpose

The unity Jesus prayed for that night has a purpose: “So that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21).

How do our churches convince the world of the central claim of the Christian faith? Is it through the number of people who walk through our doors on a Sunday morning? Is it through a gifted and dynamic staff? Is it through all our programs and activities?

Absolutely not.

We convince the world Christ is God’s one and only Son sent to this earth

to redeem and reconcile a sinful humanity by our unity. The unity of the local church is the chief testimony that will convince the world of the truth of Jesus' message and mission.

Texas Baptists, my prayer for us is the prayer of Jesus—that we come together and in doing so, provide the world evidence that our Savior is real.

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