

**November 6<sup>th</sup> 2011 "Oneness That Comes In Many Shapes and Sizes"**  
**John 17:20-26**

The section of John 17 that we are looking at this morning is possibly the most exciting part as far as we are concerned. For it is at this point in the prayer that Jesus prayed for us. 17:20

***"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message"***

Pause for a moment and consider the immense confidence that Jesus had in His mission and in His disciples, that is shown in these words. He knew what would happen after His death. He knew about the future growth of His kingdom. And He knew that this small band of confused and frightened followers would regroup after the resurrection, and so powerfully would the Gospel be spread that there would always be others coming to belief in Him through their witness. And that has happened and continues to happen.

The Christian Magazine "World" reported in its Feb 2008 issue the following statistics: **NET CHRISTIAN CONVERTS PER DAY:** 79,000

**FASTEST-GROWING CHRISTIAN POPULATION:** China with 16,500 per day

And here we find Jesus praying for all who would believe in Him. Praying for believers as one massive group. From the start of the church right through to His coming again, He makes no differentiation between those in the first century and those in the 21<sup>st</sup>, and He definitely makes no separation on the basis of differing ethnic backgrounds, denominational labels, or social position. He prays for those who will believe.

That is the first thing that we mustn't miss.

The Second thing concerns what it is that He prays for. V21

**that all of them may be one**

He prays that this massive group of believers from all ages—may be one. May be part of a Oneness that comes in many shapes and sizes. A Oneness that as a believer I share with the Apostle Paul. With Ignatious, church father and martyr. With Augustine, Luther, C S Lewis, Cliff Richard, and with every believer in Australia and the world today. Isn't that awesome?

And what is even more awesome is that this oneness is God given. There is a oneness amongst all believers that is not the oneness of organization, or of practice, or of governance, or of agreement. In all those areas there is immense diversity, and unfortunately that diversity has too often become

very acrimonious. The Oneness that is God given relates to what we believe about Jesus as the Son of God who died and rose again for us and who will one day return in glory.

When we get together with other believers and start to debate what we believe we will discover heaps of differences and even divisions between us. But when we discuss the Who we believe in, being God the Son, then we celebrate our Oneness.

*At the recent church together event Hayden Nelson, the Pastor of the Riverview Church, read this passage of Scripture—John 17:20-23—and said:- "We have 154 churches represented here from over 30 denominations. We have a vast variety of different ideas and practices, but regarding our belief in God the Son we are One. And tonight we celebrate that Oneness."*

I'm sure our Lord would have said 'Amen' to that. For in 17:11 Jesus had prayed for the 11 disciples the same prayer He later prayed for all believers:-

***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.***

And from the Greek structure He used there we discover something unique about this oneness. For the word 'one' is not a noun in the Greek but a verb which is of course a doing or action word. And the tense is present which means that the action is an ongoing one. So in fact what Jesus prayed for the 11 and all believers since is that we should continually be one.

In other words God has made us One though our belief in the Son. The danger is that we don't work at presenting that Oneness to the world and using it to promote the Gospel. And of course the evil one's aim is always to cause division amongst believers, and that is why Jesus prays in the same breath for our protection.

Now this Oneness is the reason why we so quickly connect with other Christians when we meet, whatever their church or background, and that's fantastic. But the Oneness itself goes way beyond that. It's a Oneness that includes God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Look at what follows on from John 17:21 where Jesus prays:- "**that all of them may be one, Father,**" ..and then goes on to add—

***just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me.***

Now it's easy for us to see the Oneness that God the Son and God the Father have. In His ministry on earth we would say that the two were very tight. They were One.

It is obvious that the Son shared completely the passion of the Father for the salvation of this world, and that the Son was completely obedient to the Father, dependent upon the Father, and consistently in communication with the Father. He was One with the Father.

And it is just as obvious that the Father loved the Son and enabled Him. He was constantly with the Son, hearing Him, honouring Him, and empowering Him. He was One with the Son.

Now that doesn't surprise us because our God is One God in three persons. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But what may surprise us is that this Oneness that we have with all other believers, includes God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as well. Even as Jesus and the Father were obviously one unit during His time here on earth, now God the Father and God the Son are One unit with the church here on earth.

That's what Jesus was referring to when He said—" ***that they may be one as we are one: <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me.***"

Christians are in a team with God the Father and the Son. We are a unit together with God by His Grace and Mercy.

*Many years ago I was involved in a choral production that was so successful that we even presented it at other churches and places. My part was very small but what excited me most was that I was part of the team. That I shared in the praise and the accolades that the whole group received because of what was presented*

As a follower of Jesus I am one within a team that is huge. It is made up of all believers in Jesus throughout the ages and also has within it at its core the Triune God.

*I see this as something like a enormous fire and rescue unit comprising of heaps of rescue vehicles and workers and many parts, big and small, that are needed to make it effective. I may be the equivalent of the smallest*

*screw on the smallest vehicle, or maybe one of the drivers of one of the trucks, but whatever I am, I am part of the fire and rescue unit. The major participant however is the founder and owner and sustainer of the unit. He holds it all together, formulates and directs its mission, and completely enables it's working. And that One is God, Father, Son and Spirit.*

Now I find that a real thrill, and I look forward to the Day when the whole team will be together in heaven, celebrating what God and His Church as one unit achieved throughout the ages.

But what that illustration also does is that it reminds us that we are One for a purpose. God has made us One with Himself for a reason. And Jesus goes on to state that reason in v23:-

***May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.***

This is the reason why our Oneness is so important. So that the message of God's love for them may be spread throughout the world. That despite our diversity as believers, our unity and our love for Jesus and for one another, would impact communities in every corner of our world bringing salvation to many.

This Oneness is not being the same but it is having the same love and desire for lost souls and above everything else it involves praying for and with one another, and spurring each other on in the work of the Kingdom. There have been many occasions unfortunately, when we have not been very good at that.

One preacher tells the following story:

*In Africa, a two-year-old child wandered off into the forest. The entire tribe spent the day searching for this youngster but could not find him. The next day, they decided to join hands and cover the entire area. They found the boy, but unfortunately, he was dead after having spent the night outside. The distraught mother cried, "Why didn't we hold hands sooner?"*

He went on to say:-*As brothers and sisters in Christ, we need to come together, join hands, and pursue a common kingdom goal. Since we are going to enjoy the same place, the same presence, and the same Person, we need to all learn to enjoy one another.<sup>24</sup> When we cooperate in Christianity unity, the world will see Jesus clearly revealed through His bride.*

This applies to the local church here as well as to the whole body of believers and it is far from easy. But Jesus has given us something that will make it possible. Look again at v22

***22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:***

What was the glory that the Father gave to the Son? It was the authority and the permission to live as a servant. To put others first even to the point of laying down His life for them.

To His church Jesus gives the same glory. The privilege of service. The authority to act towards one another and others as Jesus acted towards us—as a servant. To give ourselves in love as He first loved us. To accept others as He first accepted us. Only by taking on this glory that He has given us and living it out will we make the difference that He desires of us. Only by each and all of us becoming Jesus to others will we reach that perfect unity that He prayed for.

*Spartacus* is a classic movie that retells the historical account of the great Roman slave rebellion in 71 B.C. Spartacus was a highly trained gladiator who escaped and led other slaves to freedom. As news of his rebellion grew, thousands of slaves joined his cause and followed him through victories and defeats.

Near the end of the movie, a massive Roman army under the command of Senator Crassus captures the rebels. Although Crassus does not know what Spartacus looks like, he suspects that Spartacus is among the prisoners under guard. In full Roman uniform, Crassus gallops up to the mouth of the valley where the prisoners are being held and shouts an offer to them: they can escape death by crucifixion if they turn Spartacus over to him. Spartacus studies the ground for a moment and then nobly gets to his feet, intending to turn himself in.

But before he can do so, his comrade to the left stands and calls out, "I am Spartacus!" Then his comrade to the right also stands and calls out, "I am Spartacus!" As the real Spartacus looks on, comrade after comrade in his slave army rises to their feet and calls out, "I am Spartacus!" until there is a chorus of thousands united.<sup>26</sup>

As slaves of Jesus Christ, we need to stand as one and identify with our Lord Jesus even though it could mean our own end. Such Oneness can change the world.

