

GLENWOOD COMMUNITY CHURCH

December 27, 2020

The Father's Glory

John 17:20-26

Ben Cunningham

[piano]

Brandon Dickson:

Good morning, y'all. It's great to see you this morning. I hope you had a wonderful Christmas, eating fantastic food and connecting with loved ones. Just have one thing for you today.

On January 10th we're going to be spending time in the service celebrating Nathan and the Nymeyer family for their ten years of service for us. So, you can find out more information at glenwoodcc.org/nathan. If you would like to drop him or give him a thank-you note or an encouraging note, you can go ahead and mail those into the church. Or, if you want, you can drop them in at the office this week. We're going to be-- the office is going to be open Tuesday through Thursday.

So, let's go before our Father in prayer. Bow your heads with me.

Father, thank You for Your goodness, Your kindness, Your love towards us. We thank You for this advent season that we just celebrated. We thank You that, even in these crazy times where everything just seems up in the air and unsure, we can count on You being faithful, being steady, being our Rock, never changing, Lord. As we go into the new year, help us to continue to fix our eyes upon You, to put our hope in You and put our trust in You, Lord, because You will not abandon us; You

will not change at all; You will continue to remain faithful to us. Be with us right now as we worship You, as we draw closer towards You. We ask this in Your Son's name. Amen.

Ben Rico:

Good morning. Well, good morning! I, too, hope that you found joy in celebrating that God the Father sent God the Son to save His people. As we meditate on God's glory together this morning, I would ask that you would read passages of Scripture to help us do that. As God's revealed word in Christ, we can enjoy that together. I will start us off in reading, and if you would respond along with Katherine in reading next. Let us go before God in worship and in praise as we glorify His name above all names.

From Ephesians 1,

Ben: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

Katherine: "For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ,"

Ben: "In accordance with His pleasure and will-- to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves."

Katherine: "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, Who came from the Father full of grace and truth."

Ben: "In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory."

Katherine: "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation."

Ben: "Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit."

Katherine: "Who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of His glory."

Ben: "Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen."

Katherine: "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

[music: "Hark, the Herald Angels"]

Ben Cunningham:

Good morning. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the clarity and the mystery of the incarnation, that the divine Son took on humanity, and that we can say that, even though we

once regarded Him according to the flesh, we regard Him thus no longer. That's the doing of the Holy Spirit, and we give You thanks that You have given us eyes to see the beauty and glory of Jesus. Help us to treasure Him; help us to worship Him; help us to follow Him more closely as a result of being in Your innermost word this morning. We need You for this; we admit that up front; and we ask for Your help. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.

When a person opens up a gift, their face says it all. There's either that flicker of joy that comes or the immediate attempt to cover up their disappointment by being polite. And sometimes, if your kids are young enough and perhaps to your dismay, their mouth may say it all as well. It's really hard to hide our response to a gift, even those of us who are less expressive. And that's because gut-level reactions are very telling things. They teach us things.

I wonder about the facial expressions of those who were a part of the first advent. For example, what did Mary do when the angel spoke of her baby and said, quote, *"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end"*? How did she react to that? Did she wince, did she smile, did she just look confused? Or how about the face of Simeon, the man who was promised to see the Christ? What did his face say when the words came out of his mouth, *"Lord, now you are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation, that You have prepared in the presence of all peoples: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Your people Israel"*? What did these faces of advent say?

Gut reactions are telling things. And in our passage this morning, we get to hear a gut-level prayer of our Lord Jesus. When we think of Jesus, we normally think of submission and sacrifice and abiding by the Father's will, and that's right and true. If you scanned our chapter in verses 4-8, you would find evidence of that: that Jesus only does the work the Father sends Him, that He saves the people whom the Father gives Him, that He says only what the Father tells Him to say. But in our

passage this morning, we get to overhear the heart of our Savior poured out to His Father. We get to hear what Jesus wants and what He prays for His people. This is a telling moment that teaches us about why Jesus came, why He's leaving the way He is, and why we were left in the world to follow the Father as well. And the Holy Spirit wanted us to overhear this prayer for our own lives and for the life of our church this morning so that it would shape us.

I'll be reading our text as we go through our different points this morning. Before we get to the first verse in verse 20; we'll be in John 17:20-26. I'd like to just use two words to outline what Jesus prays for His people. The worlds are "united" and "reunited." United and reunited. We'll spend the bulk of our time on the first one, and we'll talk about implications as we go.

So let's talk about "united." Jesus' prayer for unity can be broken down into three question. Who? What? And Why? Who is united? What are they united around? And why are they united; what's the purpose?

To answer the question of who's united, we need to keep in mind the whole prayer and go back a little bit. Jesus is praying to the Father in verse 1; we know that. He's praying personally in verses 1-5 and reflecting on His earthly mission, because He says His "hour" - which is code for his death and resurrection - that hour has finally come. In verses 6-19, He shifts to pray that the Father would keep the apostles from something and for something. He prays that they would be kept from the evil one, that they would be kept from harm, that His protective shepherding is now being removed because of leaving, although He's giving the Holy Spirit. So, He says to keep them from harm. And He says to also keep them for something, that these apostles are going to be sent; they're going to be this team that carries this compelling message about what God has done in the person of Christ.

So, as we come to our section in verse 20, the substance of Jesus' prayer doesn't change much, but the group that He's praying for does; it expands. Look with me at John 17:20. Jesus prays, *"I do not ask on behalf of these alone"* - referring to His

apostles - *"but for those also who believe in Me through their word."* Jesus expands His prayer from just these apostles to, now, anyone who would believe in Him. Anyone, anywhere around the world for the centuries that would follow. And this should cause us to perk up a little bit. Because all this while we've been talking about how Jesus has been talking to His apostles and, by extension-- and how it is applicable to us by an extension, but here we have Jesus directly praying-- we can confidently say-- for us and our church.

And that means something. That means a great deal. If Jesus says that anything we ask in His name and for His glory will be given to us, imagine God's receptivity to the prayer of His Son. Are you curious what the heart of our Savior is for His church? What He wants from us? How He spends His final words before He faces the cross? He could have directed His prayer in a lot of different ways, so let's hear the what and the why of Jesus' heartfelt desire in verse 21-23.

He continues, *"That they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as we are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that they world may know that You sent Me, and love them, even as You have loved Me."*

What is it that Jesus prays for? What's the content? And let this sink in: Jesus prays for the unity of His church. That's what He chooses to pray for.

Now, unity didn't exactly mark these guys at this point, right? Judas has just left to betray Him. Jesus has already told Peter that he is going to temporarily defect. And Jesus also says that, as soon as things get hot, His disciples are going to scatter. And so, what is this unity that Jesus prays for? As He looks into the future of the church, what is it characterized by? Three things we notice.

First, it's a unity grounded in the truth. Followers of Jesus must agree on certain things, certain truths, some foundational teachings of Scripture. After all, we are set apart, or sanctified, in the truth as Jesus says. So what is that? We see that in verse 20, when He's describing who He's praying for, "*for those also who believe in me through their*" - the apostles - "*word*".

And this just makes sense. If we're going to be ambassadors of Jesus, that means we need to understand His message. We need to subscribe to it, right? We need to know Him as Lord. And though this teaching will continue through the Holy Spirit in all of its nuance that we need as the demands of following Jesus change, there's something that is kind of a core, central truth that Jesus highlights in a couple different places in His prayer that we need to believe.

He has in mind this amazing truth that we celebrate this advent season, that God the Father sent the divine Son. That piece of information, that knowledge, that understanding of revelation is central to who the church is. Look at John 17:3. Jesus says, "*And this is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*" Look at verse 8. "*For I have given them the words that You gave me; and they have received them and have come to know*" - what? - "*in truth that I came from You, and they have believed that You sent Me.*" People who opposed Jesus in John 15 earlier, He describes as those who don't believe that the Father sent the Son.

See, this is a massive claim that we're making about advent and about Christmas. A lot of things flow from it; a lot of dominoes fall if you believe in the incarnation. It's like the fulcrum that sends people in two different directions. A lot hinges on our understanding of the incarnation.

J. A. Packer says this about the incarnation in his great book *Knowing God*. He says, "The really staggering Christian claim is that Jesus of Nazareth was God made man. It is here in the thing that happened at the first Christmas that the profoundest and most unfathomable depths of the Christian revelation lie. The

divine Son became a Jew. The Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, unable to do more than lie and stare and wriggle and make noises, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is the truth of the incarnation.”

This is the real stumbling block of Christianity. Once we grant that Jesus was divine, it becomes unreasonable to find difficulty in any other things; it is all of a piece and hangs together completely. The incarnation is in itself an unfathomable mystery, but it makes sense of everything else that the New Testament contains.

Our unity is built on truth, and one of those central truths is that God sent His divine Son into the world. So, it’s a unity grounded in truth.

But secondly, it’s also a unity in sanctifying fellowship with the Trinity. You’ll notice in verse 21 and 23 there’s a lot of ‘us and them,’ ‘them and us,’ ‘you and me’ language going on. And what that’s saying is basically that our fellowship with God is central to our fellowship with one another. That our fellowship with God is both an accomplished thing and increasing thing.

It’s accomplished, right? We’re one in Christ; we have access to the Father through the Spirit. That’s a present reality; that’s true; we know God through Jesus in an irreversible, set-apart kind of way.

But it’s also increasing. We are being sanctified, and as we’re sanctified, we’re unified. Look at verse 25 and 26. Jesus says, *“O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent me.”* Again back to that incarnation. Verse 26, *“And I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”* See, Jesus continues and says that this revelation will continue of the Father through the ministry of the Spirit. In verse 23, He says,

"*that they may be perfected in unity.*" Assuming that there's work to be done, right?

So, our unity is in sanctifying fellowship with the Trinity. That's an accomplished thing, but it's also something that increases and grows as we're sanctified in Him.

It's like any human community. A family, or a workplace, or a sports team, or any association that's happening. There is an official sense of oneness, right? In your family, you often share a last name, right, and you share history; you have that in common. Or you're on an assembly line, and you're working to make this product with other people, and you have that as a unified mission. Or you're wearing a uniform that has a certain name on it that other people have the same one. There's an official sense of oneness. But then there's also a practical sense of oneness, that ebbs and flows, right? As we quarantine with our families for months on end, there's an ebb and flow to the unity that exists in every house, right? Or in workplaces, work drama ensues. Or as a team fails to work together, and they have different goals or different ideas.

And what's unique though about the church is that God is present and active in preserving the unity of the church. We are not left to ourselves to do this. Thank God, right? Jesus actually prays that the unity of the church would reflect the unity that exists within the Trinity, which is a remarkable thing to pray for.

So, our unity is in the truth. But our unity is not just on our own, it's in sanctifying fellowship with the Trinity.

It's also, thirdly, a unity that participates in the glory of Jesus. Look at verse 22. This is initially perplexing. Jesus says, "*The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one.*" The unity that Jesus prays for will be helped somehow by this sharing of glory that He gives. What does this mean?

Earlier in His 'High Priestly Prayer' - is what this chapter is called - He talks about a preincarnate glory, before-the-world-was-made kind of glory, this brilliant display that the apostles got to see in part on that mountain that one unique time. This isn't the glory that He's talking about sharing with His people. He's not saying, 'Well, I have, like, a pie at Christmas; I'll give you a slice and give you a slice from this limited supply of glory. You can have it, and it's taking it from me.' That's not the sense of sharing that He's talking about. He's talking about a glory that's sought in obedience to the Father.

This is happening all through the Gospel of John, that Jesus seeks to glorify the Father, and therefore the Father glorifies Him. In contrast of that, you will remember that the Pharisees are really excited about being glorified by one another, and that's what they're chasing. So, in John 5:44, Jesus challenges the Pharisees and says, *"How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that's from the one and only God?"* Or 7:18, *"He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory, but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in him."* Or blatantly in 8:50, *"I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges... If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is my Father who glorifies Me."* In 17:1, Jesus says, *"The hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You."*

The glory that Jesus is speaking of sharing with His disciples is the glory that results from submission to the Father, from the commitment to doing the Father's will. It's an observable trust that the Father is trustworthy.

And Jesus has already kind of shown us how this is going to work. He's used an illustration of the vine and the branches. Do you remember that? So, He says, *"Apart from me you can do nothing."* So, if you as a disciple bear fruit, people don't necessarily applaud the fruit. They say, 'That's a really nutritious vine. And that must be a really skilled vinedresser to keep the vine in the kind of condition that it would produce fruit.' Right? There's a connection between the way that we follow

Jesus and reflect His glory to others automatically brings glory to Him, because it comes from Him. And it reflects of Him. And it speaks of Him.

Jesus says this in things like 15:8, "*By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples.*" So disciples bear fruit; that points to Jesus, which then glorifies the Father who sent Him. So this is the sense in which Jesus will share His glory with the disciples. They'll take up their cross. They'll prayer the 'not-my-will-but-Yours-be-done' kind of prayers. They'll be sent into the world through this commission to share this message. So they will share in the privilege of glorifying God. They will actually be used to reveal the glory of God to other people. What an incredible privilege and mission!

And this shared pursuit-- you can see how that would serve the unity of the church, right? If this is our heartbeat, if this is what we're after, then that is naturally going to draw us together, because God is glorified in certain ways. So, of all the questions that plague the church in our time, the question above all other questions is, 'What will bring the most glory to our God?' What will make Him look great? What will publicize His worth farther and more than anything else? That is what we're about. Him! And what He's done, and what He's like, and what He's doing. Not us. And that unifies us. That brings us together. That is a mission that's worth giving to.

This is the unity that Jesus prays for. It's sanctifying fellowship with God that accords with truth, that shares His glory.

Now, what is the implication of this for us? The implication is that the unity of Glenwood Community Church matters to God. It matters to Him. Does overhearing this heartfelt prayer of Jesus change your perspective on the importance of the unity of the church? Does it's value get raised in your eyes?

Unity is a tricky thing. It seems simple, but it actually requires a lot, because we're living in a Genesis 3 world, right? It requires self sacrifice and humility. And this is

why we're warned against being quarrelsome and divisive in the New Testament over and over and over again. It's why Paul urges us to "*walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.*" What is that? He says, "*with all humility and gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*"

Now it's no secret that COVID has exposed divisive tendencies in the church in America. We're not accustomed to wrestling with issues of government overreach into religious practice and how to handle global pandemics. Right? That's not something any of us were aware of or trained in really well. And I rejoice at the many examples of people who are demonstrating an eagerness to maintain the unity of the church by putting their preferences aside for the greater good.

And Glenwood, we have to face this prayer squarely and ask, 'Are we willing to pay the cost of unity in order to follow our Savior, whatever those are?' Will we allow His prayer to redirect our hearts when we're tempted to be argumentative or insistent or divisive? Will we allow His prayer to infuse us with patience and gentleness towards those who are struggling, or have a different opinion? Will we allow His prayer to give us a heart for those who feel alone or on the fringe as a result of what's going on? Will His prayer cause greater concern for our mission?

The unity that Jesus is speaking of is not achieved simply. It's not 'kumbaya' unity, right? So, how might we contribute to this? I have a simple ask, and that's to pray. To pray regularly for the unity of our church and the churches of our area and of our country. To join Jesus in this and let the Holy Spirit direct us. He may direct some to starve divisiveness by communicating prayerfully and directly. He may lead you to initiate with those with different opinions to demonstrate a unifying care. He may lead to you repent and to reconcile with others. He may give you a wisdom and insight as a peacemaker. He may inspire a creative way to minister to those who are isolated right now. But let's pray and join Jesus in this.

Now, God used the fires of affliction to weld things together. When I was serving in Northern California, we had a wild fire that broke through our city of Santa Rosa and burnt over five thousand homes to the ground in a night. I mean, it was just unbelievable. Our church had merged with another church just a few months before; we had a lot of great plans that immediately got thrown in the recycle bin because of all that was going on. We lived in an area that was pretty hardened to the Gospel. There weren't many churches, and those that existed were small and struggling. And it was incredible to see how that difficulty bonded our church as we took water over to a FEMA village of trailers a few blocks away. And it opened up conversations between pastors who hadn't spoken in a long time, and realized that there's collaborative ways to do what we were doing and to-- we were doing things in an overlapped way that didn't make sense. And we were actually the body of Christ and tended to minister to our county. None of us would have chosen what took place. But God recycled it for incredible unity. He uses the fire of affliction to weld things together.

And could it be that God is preparing us for a different and richer season of ministry when COVID is passed by allowing us to appreciate some of these basic things that maybe we have taken for granted? Could it be that we'll emerge from this season as a more unified body with a greater clarity around what we're doing and why we're here? I pray it so. Let's do that together.

Let's talk about the why of the unity. We've talked about who; we've talked about what. Why is Jesus so interested in the unity of the church? What does this unity do? You'll notice in verses 21 and through 23 that, two different times, Jesus says what results from this unity. He says, "*So that the world may believe that You sent Me,*" in verse 21. "*So that the world may know that You sent Me, and love them,*" in verse 23.

See, our unity is tied to our witness. And it's timely that one of the main reasons why we are left in the world is to help people-- 'What in the world is going on with Christmas?' To help people know that God sent His Son to the earth to bring

resolution to the things that cannot be solved in any other way. Both times Jesus says that our unity will help the world understand what's going on with advent and why He sent the Son. We are sent into the world to announce why Jesus was sent into the world. This is a critical part of our mission. Isn't that amazing?

Why would the church's unity be so influential in the world? Well, it's because true unity costs the riches of Christ. What motivates a person to pay the cost of unity? Like, most of the earthly versions of this are ultimately self-serving, right? And only Jesus has the resources to create true and lasting unity. Unity is not this homogenous, everyone-drink-the-Koolaid, kind of weird unity. It's this valuing diversity at the same time-- of ethnicities and gifts and backgrounds. It's not uniformity; it's hard to do. And that's why it's incredible to the world when it's done.

The other reason why unity can be so influential is because divisiveness is unappealing. Who wants to be in another squabbling argument this year, right? Have you ever dealt with a company where it was obvious that the employees weren't on the same page, or the departments were at war, or something was going on where they're passive aggressive language about the incompetence of this or that, and you can just tell this is a divided house? Or have you ever ran into a married couple that just had a really saucy argument, and you can just kind of tell, and there's that ice that's forming in between them and-- There's something really unappealing and awkward about division.

And you can just imagine what spiritual division of this sort looks like to a watching world. It could rightfully ask, 'if they're message isn't compelling enough for them to love each other, why should I be interested in it?' This doesn't mean we do this perfectly, obviously, but it's something to consider that Jesus draws attention to, that it not only matters to God, but it matters to the watching world.

So what's the implications of this? Well, it's that the unity of Glenwood Community Church is vital to our mission.

Listen to our church's purpose and consider how important unity is in fulfilling it. Our purpose is "To glorify God by challenging, encouraging, and equipping people to become like Jesus in every vital relationship by loving God, loving others, and influencing others to love God."

It's pretty evident that our mission would be impossible without unity. Unity helps us introduce people to Jesus. Right? These things require God. And so we want people to come into contact with our church and think, 'only God could produce that sort of sacrificial spirit and shared understanding.' It reflects Him. And so we must ask ourselves, 'is the corporate witness of our church a priority in how we think and make decisions?' Does the church's unity matter to us, since it seems to matter to the world?

So, it affects our ability to evangelize, but it also affects our ability to challenge and encourage and equip one another. See, sharing the Gospel and living out the implications of the Gospel are intertwined things. And too often we've thought of evangelism as detached from our corporate witness and reputation in the world, when Jesus' prayer drives us back to emphasize that. We think about it merely as 'my responsibility' and not necessarily the fruit of our life together in Christ. But that seems to be what Jesus is praying for and assumes will have an impact on those who don't yet know Christ.

And so our willingness to grow and our willingness to help other people grow and to be sanctified have evangelistic implications. We're contributing or detracting from our church's corporate witness when we help or hinder that. So let's fight to preserve our unity for the sake of our mission to make disciples in Vancouver and beyond. It's an opportunity in front of us.

The second thing that Jesus prays for-- He not only prays that we be united, but He prays that we be reunited. And we see that in verse 24. Listen to this staggering verse. Jesus prays, "*Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be*

with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."

Jesus not only desires our unity, but He desires to be reunited with His people. Can you believe that that's the prayer of our Lord at this time in history?

Some of you had trouble tolerating badly behaved family members for just a few days. Maybe you breathed a sigh of relief when they left and got into their cars. The Son, who has forever taken on human flesh, comes to His own, and they don't recognize Him. Not only that, they oppose Him, reject Him, conspire against Him, arrest Him wrongfully, mock Him, spit on Him, try Him in corrupt courts, crucify Him, and watch Him slowly and publicly die. And Jesus prays, 'I want to be with My people.'

What could possibly compel the Lord to spend one of His final prayers asking to be with the likes of us? Why wouldn't He say, 'thank goodness that chapter is over!?' You know, too often we think of Jesus as merely a dutiful Son, as if He's doing the will of the Father with little or no concern for those He's saving. He's Emmanuel, but He's indifferent. But that's not what we find here. Do you see the great and generous and undeserved love of God pouring out from the Son? The generosity of the Son to even be thinking in these terms before He goes to the cross, of all things. To long to be with us?

To those who are especially lonely this year, your Savior prays this. He longs to be with you and loves you very, very much. To those who feel distance because of a guilty conscience or of sin's effects, your Savior longs to be with you, and He loves you very, very much.

Jesus desires to be with us, to share His glory - His full, brilliant, bright, unveiled glory. Words cannot begin to describe the beauty and the joy that we will have, and how we should look forward to this. His glory will be our fascination for all of eternity, because it is that rich. We will live and stay on a better Mount of

Transfiguration. Imagine seeing the beauty of Jesus Christ - the resurrected, glorified, exalted Jesus - forever in person! And it's what He prays for. He asks that that would happen.

This reminds us that the Gospel is really about being with God. As we saw in I Peter 3:18, "*For Christ suffered once for sin, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God.*" And if you think about the likelihood of a "Yes" from the Father in regards to this prayer. It's our hope, and it's our certainty.

John Piper describes it this way: "The gift of the Gospel called eternal life is not the mere extension of every earthly pleasure. It is the extension and perfection of the pleasures of knowing God and His Son Jesus Christ. All other gods must go. All other delights that are not delights in God must go. Not because anything good must be taken away, but to make room for what is infinitely best, God Himself. Divine love labors and suffers to enthrall us with what is infinitely and eternally satisfying, God in Christ." This is what Jesus prays for.

There's a moving description of this in John Bunyan's classic, *Pilgrim's Progress*, where Mr. Steadfast is longing to be with Jesus, and he's talking about preparing to cross a river which symbolizes death in this scene. And here's what he says. "This river has been a terror to many; yea, the thought of it has also frightened me; but now methinks I stand easy... The waters, indeed, are to the palate bitter, and the stomach cold; yet the thought of what I am going to, and of the conduct that waits for me on the other side, doth lie as a glowing coal at my heart... I am going now to see that head that was crowned with thorns, and that face that was spit upon for me. I have formerly lived by hearsay and faith; but now I go where I shall live by sight, and shall be with Him in whose company I delight myself. I have loved to hear my Lord spoken of; and wherever I have seen the print of His shoe in the earth, there I have coveted to set my foot too. His name has been to me sweeter than all perfumes. His voice to me has been most sweet, and His countenance I have more desire than they who have most desired the light of the sun. His Word I did use to gather for my food, and for antidotes against my faintings. He has held

me, and have kept me from my iniquities; yea, my steps He has strengthened in His way." This is the great hope and the great assurance that now we know for certain is ours because our Savior is praying for it.

So, that is our third implication, that we can rest assured the Father's answer to Jesu prayer in this regard is 'Yes.' 'Yes, You will be reunited with Your people.' All things will be brought unto unity with Christ in the end, and we will forever delight in His glory.

So, He prays that we be united; He prays that we be reunited. And you see the connection between these things. Ephesians 1 tells us about this plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in Him-- things in Heaven, and things on earth. The unity of the church, Christ being with His people, these are certain things, because all things will find their unity in Christ in the end. Jesus is simply inviting the church to enjoy His glory and to participate in His plan before every knee will bow and judgement will fall. And we are called to reflect the love and unity of God in our fellowship.

So, I think it's fitting to end a very uncertain year with a certainty, and our season of advent by thinking about His second advent. It's my prayer that we would join our Savior prayer for the church's unity, knowing at the same time we can be confident that all things will be brought under His rule. So, as you envision a new year-- maybe you've not done that; maybe you're still in denial; the Christmas lights are going to stay up for four months, I don't know. But as you think about what's to come and envision a new year and end a tough one, listen to the certain end that those in Christ will share from Revelation 21.

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His

people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning or crying or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. '...

"And I saw no temple in the city, for it's temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and it's lamp is the Lamb."

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for this last-minute prayer of Jesus. Thank You that His heartfelt desire is to reflect who He is and His love and unity in the church. And that God, we were meant to overhear this prayer. God, I pray that You would work in our hearts; You would transform us and change us. Help us to look forward to the days that are coming with hope, knowing that Your plans are never side-tracked and Your goal of glorifying Yourself is sure. We're thankful that we serve a Savior that longs to be with us and to share His glory with us. There is no lack in Him, just the overflow of joy and love that exists in the community of the Trinity, and for that we praise You and thank You-- that veiled in flesh, the Godhead we see. We pray that many others in our area be given eyes to see the glory of Jesus. We want to be used by You, God. We want this church to be a beacon of light and a place of ministry. There are so many needs around us, and we'll only know those needs in fuller extent when things open back up again. But God, I pray You'd prepare us to notice opportunities, to build unity, to exalt Your Son in this season. We're thankful for the ministry of the Holy Spirit, for His presence with us, that He will guide us into all truth, that we will bear witness to Jesus by His strength and power. Help us, God, to walk with You faithfully now. I pray this in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen.

Ben Rico:

Amen. Praise the Lord that He has revealed His glory to us in Christ, that Christ has won us to Himself, so that we would be able to see His glory, the glory of the Father. In I Chronicles 16, *"Ascribe to the Lord, O families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name. Bring an offering and come before Him; worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness."*

[music: "All Glory Be To Christ"]

Amen. In starting the rhythm of a new year, let us be unified in Christ. As we posture ourselves ready to glorify God in each area of our lives, let us align our ways with His. Amen. Go in peace.