

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of
April 2018

(added progressively after each Sunday)

(see following pages)

Our Relationship with Christ, Each Other & the World – Pt 2

Per S Olyott

(Review of last time) -

Twice in the Chapters of John's Gospel that we have been studying in recent weeks, Jesus has given assurance that His 'eleven' were 'clean'. Chapter 13:10 – where in answer to Peter's impulsive call to “Wash all of me!”, Jesus implies that all of them – except Judas – are washed clean by His blood once and for all. Then again at Chapter 15:3, Christ reminds the same 11 that they are already 'clean' through the ministrations of the Holy Spirit through His Word.

Dr John Duncan: A most Christ-like person who often doubted if he were a Christian. He was asked a question. Not whether he was happy but rather was he holy. Because the questioner knew that if John could see some Christ-likenedness in his life that would help him with his problems of assurance.

That is the prime question: not what you feel. The prime question is, “Are you holy?”

No one can be holy – Christ-like – without being linked to the stem of the vine. All who are linked to the stem are holy.

Is there a Christ-likeness in your life? That's the relationship we are to maintain with our Lord.

Verses 9-17: Having spoken to His eleven (and to us) about what relationship we are to have with Christ. Our Lord goes on to explain what relationship we are to have with each other.

The age when wooden spoked, steel-rimmed cart wheels were in common use for transport of goods has passed. But we can see some of them decorating gardens and maybe hanging on walls. Making a cartwheel, was an intricate skill. Very rare these days.

First of all you would make the hub; then fit to it all the separate spokes. These will be properly related to each other only if they are correctly placed in the hub. That explains our Lord's instruction here.

Having first explained what relationship they are to have with Him, then He speaks to them about what relationship they should have with each other.

Because when Christians are rightly related to Christ, then they are rightly related to each other. But there is no hope of their ever being rightly related with each other, if they are not rightly related to Him. Take away the hub and the whole wheel will be destroyed.

In these verses Christ is going to tell His disciples to love each other. But before that He talks about love generally.

Verse 9: He explains that He Himself is loved. ⁹ *As the Father has loved me, ...*. Think about that for a moment. What is it that binds the glorious members of the Trinity together? What relationship does the Father have to the Son? It's the relationship of love. The eternal bands that bind Father, Son and Holy Spirit together are bands of love.

Therefore any of you – who claim to be joined to the Triune God and to know Him – it's natural that you should expect that the bands that bind you to people of like faith, will also be bands and bonds of love.

Look again at verse 9: You see that Jesus talks about His love to the disciples. ⁹ *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.* As you read through the passage He gives them 4 proofs that He loves them:

- he loves them because He lays down His life for them. Verse 13. There's a great 'prostitution' of the word 'love' today.¹ But our Lord proves that He loves His disciples, because He is going to lay down His life for them. That's the supreme test of love, that if only one of you can live out of two that you will gladly give your life that the other one might live. That's what love is. Desiring the welfare and benefit of the other even at the greatest cost to yourself. That's Christ's love to His people.
- The second proof of His love: verses 13 (end), 14 and 15 (beginning) He calls them 'friends'. He's very pleased to call this little group of eleven, His friends. He refuses to call them servants. At verse 15 the proof that He accepts them as friends is that He opens His mind to them. That is a proof of friendship. Those you are closest to: you are most open with. Some of you have deep secrets, that you wouldn't tell to those that are fairly close to you, but with one or two of those closest, you feel you can open your heart to them. That's what our Lord was like with those disciples. He told them things that the Father had told Him! That's a proof that He loved them.
- Verse 16. A proof that He loved them was that He loved them, before they ever chose Him.
- He ordained them to be the instruments of His glory in the world. Putting that honour upon them. Guaranteeing that the fruit they bore would remain. He repeated His promise that He would answer their prayers.

Here's our Lord saying that He's loved by His Father and so He loves them. He still hasn't got onto loving one another.

Before He does so He now talks about their love for Him.

Verse 9: ... *Abide (continue) in my love.* “Don't ever give me a reason to treat you as a withered branch.” “The way to continue in my love (verse 10) is to obey my commandments, just as I obey my Father's commandments.” That brings fullness of joy (verse 11). That's the way to be Christ's friends. (verse 12)

So it's only after the Lord has spoken about His Father's love to Him; His love to His disciples; and He encourages them to show their love for Him – in being obedient, that

¹ As this Sermon is being written, the ABC TV channel is boasting their 40 year coverage (and championing) of the Sydney Mardi Gras – Gay Rights parade. Extolling current developments as a victory for 'love'. Such comments as: that there 'used to be a law against love' – decrying the laws that once prohibited homosexual acts.

He turns in final fullness to their loving each other.

He shows to them that spiritual bonds are always bonds of love: the bonds that bind the Persons of the Trinity together; the bonds that bind Christ to His people and these people to Christ are bonds of love. Therefore it would be most unnatural if the bonds that bind us to each other were not bonds of love.

So in Verse 12 and 17, He gives a command! To His Church. To love one another.

Remember verse 10: ¹⁰ *If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, ...*
Now verse 12: ¹² *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.* And then verse 17: ¹⁷ *These things I command you, so that you will love one another.*

"If you are going to continue in my love you must obey my commands. If you want to avoid giving me a reason for disowning you. You must obey me!" The command is to love one another.

If you think about that closely our Lord is saying, that a Christian who doesn't love His fellow Christian is not a Christian. The 'sign' that you are loved by Christ is that you'll obey Him: that's the proof that you are loved by Christ. The command is that you love one another. So people who don't love one another, but claim to be Christians are not Christians.

Some time later, John emphasises this in His letter. He lived to see when there were thousands of people who professing to be Christians throughout the known world, nevertheless nursed hate in their hearts towards others who professed to be Christians. He emphasised that to love fellow Christians was a 'mark' of being a Christian oneself. If you don't have that mark you are no Christian. John was justified in stressing this because our Lord had already taught it. As we see in today's reading.

Our Lord has twice given commands. Keep close (abide) in the Lord and keep close to the Lord's people. He's given us a lovely picture of a Christian: a Christian is a person who walks with Christ and who walks with Christians.²

To walk closely with the Lord is to walk closely with His people.

Verse 18-27: Our Lord has taken His eleven. They are still walking towards Gethsemane. He needs to instruct them about something more. Awful things are going to happen in Gethsemane. They're going to see Him sweating drops of blood as it were; then Judas will come; and a mob with staves and sticks and weapons. They will see their Lord despite-fully used.

² You might hear a lot of nonsense when people are objecting to coming to Church. And there are lots of things about 'Church' (the human institution, not Christ's true Church) that can be improved. We all know that, but no born again person who loves Christ and is loved by Christ can not be in the place where he doesn't love other Christians. No born again person stays voluntarily away from the family, because Christ's people are His people. There is something very dangerous about a person who professes to be a Christian, but who is a willing absentee from such family gatherings. There's something very suspicious about someone who never gets involved in a Church. There's something quite contradictory about someone who says he's a Christian but never lives for the welfare of fellow Christians. It cuts right across what our Lord is saying here.

So our Lord must tell them not only about their relationship with Him and their relationship to each other, but also what their relationship with the world is going to be in the future. They are going to start to witness this in just a few minutes time.

Look now at His description of the believers relationship with the rest of the world. It's really quite simple. Nobody who lives close to Christ will live close to the world! They are poles apart. Consider the globe of the earth. At one axis is the North Pole and then as far away as you can get at the other axis is the South Pole.³ If you are at the Equator and you walk towards the North Pole you must be walking away from the South. While if you walk towards the South Pole you must walk away from the North.

Similarly the closer you are to Christ the further you'll be away from the standards and affections of the world. The more you fit in with what's going on, the further you'll be away from Christ. They're poles apart! There on different sides. Our Lord says, quite dogmatically, in verse 18, that you can expect hate and you shouldn't be surprised. Because the world hates Christ. Therefore it hates those who are Christ's.

It's this theme He continues in this remaining section.

Verse 19: *⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own;* The world loves to get drunk: if the Church ran a bar where you could get drunk, they would love the Church. Some so called Churches could do that. The world likes to live as it pleases, so if you as a Christian church had a Minister that said it's alright to live as you please. You'd rate high in popularity though low in respect. Just fit in with what the world says and give it a Christian flavour – put Christian names to it – but say what the spirit of the age is saying, and the world will love you. If you are of the world, the world will love its own!

... but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

Our Lord isn't saying that you should go away and hide in the desert (or a monastery!). We have to live in this world. But Christ has chosen us out of it by His Word and Gospel. We have a different set of affections; different allegiances, a different Master. In effect a different race.

And simply, and only, because true Christians are different, that persecution comes. The world can't understand why Christians 'tick' this way, so because they are different it persecutes them.

But don't be surprised in verse 20 Jesus says, that if they treated the Master in this way then it is certain they will treat the servant in that way. They do this because they don't know that God sent the Lord Jesus Christ. And the world is guilty. This is the theme of verse 22 onwards.

'Keepers of the house' will understand this analogy. You use the vacuum and clean the 'front room' as clean as you can get it. Then apply a special polish which does so

³ A tricky question: Where could you place a square house with a window in each side so that all windows face North? At the South Pole.

many wonderful things (so they say). Of course the room is sparkling. Not a trace of dust anywhere. Then a beam of light from the sun comes through a window and it shows all the dust in the air and even on those freshly polished surfaces! Because the 'light is shining'.

“The light has shone in the world”, Jesus says, from verse 22 onwards. Holy words have been spoken in this world and holy works have been done. It's plain who Christ is, and what His identity is. But the world instead of being grateful, that the Sun has shone, is resentful that its sin has been shown up. Therefore the world persecutes Christ. And therefore those who are Christ's.

²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ Whoever hates me hates my Father also. ²⁴ If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. ²⁵ But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'

If our Lord had stopped there the eleven would have been filled with depression.

“If you go into the world you can expect injustice”, says Jesus. “Ill treatment. Hate. Spite. Malice. That will be the fate of anyone who is a Christian and speaks up for Christ.” So you could draw the conclusion that nobody could be converted. If it hadn't been for the remaining two verses of this passage. This is what would have happened:

Paul would have come along the road to Damascus;

Christ would have spoken from heaven and Paul would have spat back, to continue on to complete his persecution of Christians.

If not for the final two verses:

Augustine, that immoral man who became such a wonderful Christian, would never have picked up the book, or even if he did he would not have been convinced by what it said.

Similarly, Luther and countless others would never have been transformed.

Because the human heart, by nature hates Christ! Because the Words of Christ and the people of Christ, show up the world's sin.

It's because of the Holy Spirit that there is any Christian witness in the world”

²⁶ “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. ²⁷ And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

Here were those Apostles, who had been with Him from the beginning, and with great courage would go into the world and speak of Christ. But this would all be pointless, without the ministry of the Holy Spirit. People hate Christian teaching. But the Holy Spirit worked the miracle in those God has chosen, then and now.

Christ's will for the Church is that it live close to Him and the members also live close to each other.

What to Expect Before Christ's Second Coming

Per S Olyott

(Review of last time) -

We've seen that our Lord has 'observed' the Last Supper, with His disciples. When the supper is over, He's told the disciples that He is going away. And He's leaving behind three things. That was in chapter 14 – His Word; His Spirit; and His Peace.

Today we all have His word – the whole of the Bible in fact. Some, by His grace, also Have His Spirit, and therefore by having Word and Spirit you have His peace.

Then our Lord went out of the 'upper room' and through the narrow streets of Jerusalem towards the Mount of Olives, where there was a garden called Gethsemane. On the way He sees a vine and we also imagine that in the distance on the slopes of the Mount He sees people, who are camping out on the hill, burning discarded vine cuttings. That leads Him to speak about the vine and the branches.

He also talks about the fact that once He is away they must sustain a certain relationship with Him; each other; and the world. In this they must expect that there will be persecution from the world.

Now Chapter 16:

He now tells His disciples what it will be like during the time when He is away. This is a chapter of promises. They are not all pleasant ones. He says that during the period of His absence, till He comes again, we can count on certain things. Both unpleasant and pleasant things. This chapter has this theme.

It is easy to follow – our Lord was a master teacher.

His pattern of concern is by using concentric circles. Like a target. He starts with the outer – those who are furthest from Him: the world (the unconverted). Thankfully not all the unconverted will remain unconverted. So our Lord then speaks about those a little closer in and how conversion comes about. Then He talks about believers and certain things about them during this time when He will be absent. And then closest in, the individual believer and his relationship with God.

Right now our Lord is still away! We look forward to His return, all we hope and long for, but in the meantime in verses, 1 to 4, we are told what to expect.

First consider the outward circle. You can count on certain things from the world during the Lord's absence. In chapter 15 He has already told us that the world will persecute us. He has told the disciples that is so because the world hates Him. So He says here in verse 1: *'I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away.* Jesus has already told of the sower and the seed. The seed was the Word of God. He explained that when some people receive the seed in their hearts it grows very quickly, because it's sown on rocky ground. There's not much soil. It springs up quickly indeed, but the sun shines and it withers, just as quickly as it grew.

Some people who hear the Gospel think it's the most glorious thing they have ever heard, but when they are ridiculed, ostracised, criticised – persecuted, because of the Gospel they 'throw over' their apparent Christian Faith, just as quickly as they took it up.

So our Lord says: “I'm warning you about persecution so that when it happens you won't fall away or stumble, like that.” He tells them in verse 2 what sort of persecution it will be. They were Jews. Every Friday night through to Saturday evening they went up to the synagogue. Here the Scriptures were read. Preaching occurred, Questions asked and answered about holy things. But Jesus said that the time was coming when they will put you out of the synagogues.

And those who hear the Word of God and say prayers there, will have nothing to do with you. Indeed, don't underestimate how far persecution will go. Killing is something that's going to happen to Christians.

“I'm telling you before it happens, so that when it happens you won't feel 'let down'. You won't say that you have come into the Christian Faith under false pretences.”
³ *And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me.”*

That's the reason for persecution. Here's a man and at last he has a son born. He longs for the day when he can walk with his boy to the pub and they can both put their elbows on the bar together and he can buy his round and his boy can buy his. It can be 'hail fellow, well met' with his boy. Then His boy gets converted, finding that the pub isn't the place that he wants to be. Nor the company that he wants.

The father's hopes are dashed. He cannot understand his boy. It's like there is someone in his family who doesn't belong like he used to. He doesn't understand that his boy knows God. That his lad knows Christ, because he doesn't know what it is to know the Father himself or to know the Son.

The boy is an enigma to him. As a result many a father would be turned against his son. Say spiteful things and sometimes engage in spiteful actions. That's always the reason for persecution. People who know the Father don't persecute members of the same family. People who know what it is to know Christ don't persecute others who know Christ.

It's because the world cannot explain and understand spiritual enlightenment that it engages in persecution.

So whenever people say undeserved, untruthful and malicious things about you, because you are a Christian, nothing has happened except what Christ promised. (And if they don't do such things, then perhaps it's not sufficiently clear that you are a Christian.)

This is how it is to be while Christ is away. Heaven forbid you should feel bitter and hard done by. Rather the Christian should bow in worship and thank Jesus Christ his Lord for His faithful Word that warns him of it, before it ever happens.

Verse 5-11. Fortunately not all the unconverted world will remain unconverted. If the unconverted world had remained unconverted of course there would have been none of us here today. The Christian Church is only ever, one generation from extinction! Yet there is an unbroken chain of believers from the time that our Lord spoke to the present moment. In every generation. In every culture now there are people coming to Christ. So our Lord moves in a little bit (in our target analogy) because there are some who are no longer in the outer circle. He now talks about believers and how they become believers.

In verse 5 & 6 what our Lord means is this: "I'm going away", He says. "all you can think about is how sorry you are because I am going away. Instead of thinking about where I'm going."

But none the less there's a truth, which Jesus wants to bring out: (verse 7) It's to be beneficial for them if He goes away. They think to themselves that things will be better if he stays. If He never had to go. If the one who spoke like no one ever spoke should stay with them. If He could go on opening eyes and making the lame to walk and raising the dead. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have Jesus and themselves together always.

"No," says Jesus, "it's expedient for you that I go away, for if I don't go away, the Comforter won't come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you."

There are blessings that can come to you from the Holy Spirit which don't, and wouldn't come to us if Jesus Christ had remained amongst us and never sent the Spirit!

What will the Holy Spirit do when He comes?⁴ Jesus answers: three things in verse 8. *⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgement:*

What did Jesus mean when He says the Spirit will convict the world concerning **sin** and **righteousness** and **judgement**?

In the unconverted world the Holy Spirit will move and He will **convince** people of these three things. The word 'convict' (reprove in KJV) also can be used to mean convince – to persuade to bring to a conviction of a truth.

- The first thing that the Holy Spirit does in an unconverted life is that He convicts of sin. It once was common for sermons to be preached on sin, where all the 'points' began with "f": the **fact** of sin – the Holy Spirit convinces of the fact of sin. That you are a rebel against the living and true God; the **fault** of sin – that you are in this condition and it is your own fault. It's wrong to be in such a condition. You are an offence to God. The holy Spirit convinces you of that; the **folly** of sin – it is always foolish to sin because God's ways are wise. Anything that is not God's way is foolish. He is the only wise God. The Holy Spirit convinces you

⁴ WLC 72 (WCF 14) *What is Justifying Faith?* Justifying faith is a saving grace, worked in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and the word of God. By this grace he is convinced of his sin and misery and of his inability in himself and all other creatures to deliver himself from his lost condition. He not only assents to the truth of the promise of the gospel but receives and rests on Christ and His righteousness held forth in the gospel, for pardon of sin and for the accepting and reckoning of himself righteous in the sight of God for salvation.

that it is foolish to be this way; the **filth** of sin – the Holy Spirit convinces you that you are polluted and unrighteous. Your pride is broken and you see yourself as such an awful person in God's sight.

When the Spirit comes He will convince: ⁹ *concerning sin, because they do not believe in me*; There are many sins of which you can be convinced (convicted) by the Spirit, but the worst of all is the one singled out here – *that you do not believe in me*.⁵

The Holy Spirit convinces you of your sin. He convinces you that sin reigns in you and sin ruins you. It does so because you are not united by faith to Jesus Christ. Yet in this cynical, laughing, persecuting world, the Holy Spirit moves. Some who sneer, stop sneering. And some who persecute no longer 'lift the heel'.⁶ They become subdued and troubled by their conscience: convinced of their sins, recognising that they have despised God's Son. They are ashamed. That's the Holy Spirit's work.

No human logic can bring this about. Not all the books of philosophy – though they have a certain value; not the 'cold logic' with which we can explain that the world is wrong and Christ is right can make you ashamed of your sins. Nor make you call for Salvation from Jesus Christ. That is the Spirit's work.

- The Holy Spirit does more, Verse 10 ¹⁰ *concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ...*

Do you want proof that Jesus Christ lived a perfect life? The proof is that when He died God raised Him from the dead and took Him as the man, Christ Jesus, straight into the eternal glory. Had there been one spot in Jesus Christ; one fault; falling short – the slightest imperfection, He would have been excluded from heaven!

The one who lived amongst us is still the man, Christ Jesus. He has gone straight to heaven. That proves His righteousness. (His resurrection is the sign, seal and promise of our eventual resurrection, hence He is for ever called the 'first born' of the dead.)

The Holy Spirit works in a life convincing the elect sinner that the only righteous life that has ever been lived is that life of Jesus Christ.

When the Lord Jesus was in the world people could look on Him. There in front of them was a visible example of perfection. But now His physical presence has gone. There is no visible example of perfection before us anymore. But the Holy Spirit still works through the Scriptures – through the Bible, through the Word and convinces people that the one who lived amongst, and is now in Heaven, did live without spot or stain – was perfectly righteous. So if there is any hope for a sinner, it must be in Him.

5 It's an awful thing to take God's name as an oath and use it like a cheap word, when He is the God who will judge you. It's an awful thing to commit adultery – to break the marriage bond, even in the mind, when God has instituted marriage to be fruitful, honourable and pleasurable and the basis of happiness in society. But above all it is an awful thing not to believe in Christ. Not to believe who He says He is. And not to cast oneself upon Him to be one's Saviour.

6 An expression from Psalm 41:9 used by Jesus at John 13:18 to figuratively describe the betrayal of Judas,

The Holy Spirit's work concerning righteousness, *because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer;*

[2058]

May this be the case for all the saints gathered here today.

Next week we will continue from verse 11: concerning judgement.

What to Expect Before Christ's Second Coming – Pt2

Per S Olyott

(Review of last time) -

Thursday night before Christ's death, He is a few hours alone with His disciples and John much later in his life is reminded of these (and other events) by the Holy Spirit and so he writes it all down for us to read now.

After the 'last Supper' He explains to His disciples that He is going away, Their hearts are broken, But He explains that when He's gone away He will leave behind His Word and He will send His Spirit. Together these will bring His peace. So their hearts are encouraged.

They move from the 'upper room' and pass through the Jerusalem streets on their way to the Mount of Olives. They pass vines and also see fires of burning, discarded vine branches in the distance on the Mount. From this Jesus – the true vine – tells them about the relationships that should exist between Him and them; and the relationship they should sustain between them and Him, with each other and the world, when He is gone.

Then in Chapter 16 a further discourse: He tells what will happen once He goes away. To warn and prepare them. He starts with the wider world – the unconverted – and what to expect from them. Then He talks about those who will be converted from the world and how their conversion comes about: by the action of the Spirit working through the Word. He speaks about the three things the Spirit will convince in the heart of the becoming believer: sin, righteousness and judgement. The Spirit convinces the unconverted of their sin. And of the remedy – the absolute righteousness of Jesus Christ. The only way they can be saved from the consequences of their sin and be restored, by Christ's merit and sacrifice, to be reconciled to God .

Now we look from verse 11 at the third thing the Spirit convinces: judgement.

Verse 11: ... Of Judgement. He convinces of Judgement because ... *the ruler of this world is judged*. The ruler of this world is the devil! And he is judged. What that means is this: that the man who is on the side of the devil – everyone who is not with Christ is with the devil – suddenly realises that there is no future in being on the devil's side. For as long as he serves himself he serves evil. As long as he serves evil he serves the devil. But the devil is damned and all those who follow the devil must be damned with the devil. When he comes to understand that – the victory has been won by Christ, the devil's power over him has been defeated. He recognises that he has been serving a losing foe. Becoming convinced that there is no future for evil. The wrong side to be on – is the way to be lost.

Therefore he flees to Jesus Christ. It is the Spirit who convinces in this way .. of judgement.

Jesus, more broadly, has defeated the devil in many ways: The devil came to Christ with all sorts of temptations and insinuations. Our Lord never budged.

The devil never takes us to the ultimate! Like He tried with Christ. Commonly we give in to his temptations only after he has pushed a little. But with Christ he went to the final extreme, yet Christ did not budge an inch. There was never any evil found in Him. What temptation! What intensity the Lord Jesus experienced. He never gave in. So in this way He defeated the devil.

At last our Lord was laid in the grave, under the power of death: how the fiends of hell must have rejoiced. The second Person of the Trinity had come amongst us as the man, Christ Jesus, and now He was laid in the grave. It must have looked as though Jesus of Nazareth was finally brought to defeat. The devil's temptations hadn't been able to succeed, but now! It looked like he had won after all.

But on the Sunday morning the Lord Jesus Christ burst out of that tomb with the power of an endless life, never to die again. The keys of the grave in His hands. Proving that the devil has no power over Him! The devil is defeated. Totally.

Now here's that man who's lived without Christ, despising the Gospel, suddenly he realises that to live as he is, is to be lost, because he's on the wrong side. Because the only one who has ever triumphed is Jesus of Nazareth. So this man realises that he will have to bow the knee to Jesus the Lord: either as one to be damned or bow as a glad servant. So he bows to Christ calling on Him for salvation⁷ and joins His side. It's the work of the Holy Spirit.

This is what Jesus promises will go on in the world during His absence. Persecution but also conversion. He is showing here that people who are converted are primarily people who are ashamed. People who recognise their guilt.

Only Jesus Christ has lived spotlessly. None of us can come close to this. We are judged. As we are, we can never please the Living God.

We look for a Saviour. The only Saviour we can see – not Mohamed nor Buddha, they and all the others died and stayed dead – is Christ because He alone is acceptable to God, because God has received Him into glory.

Have you seen that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour and cried out to Him to save you. Believing that what you should bear he has born. That without Him you are lost.

Then you call out to Christ. Your heart broken by what the Holy Spirit has convicted in your heart. If that's been your experience, it IS the work of the Holy Spirit. It's time to bow the head in prayer and say, "Thank You Lord." Because the ascended Christ has looked in mercy upon you and He has sent the Holy Spirit into your life. Through

⁷ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 from Joel 2:32

Gospel preaching, you've been convinced of your sin; Christ's righteousness; you've been overcome with a sense of judgement; your heart's been searched; your hopes and foundations have been stripped away from you and you've been brought to call on Jesus Christ and to trust in Him, only. Because if He won't have you – there's no one else.

That's the work of Holy Spirit. No man can call Jesus Christ Lord, except by the Holy Spirit. It's a marvellous thing that those who oppose the Gospel can be conquered by an invisible Person .

So Paul (Saul) can go steaming up the Damascus road *breathing out threats and slaughter*. (Acts 9:1) But on the Damascus road while he is so against, he can be conquered and brought to call Jesus Christ, "Lord".

Centuries ago, in Italy, one of the most immoral men the world has ever seen, sat down in a chair in a friend's garden and heard a child's voice, "Take up and read" The man stretched out his hand to something lying in the grass near his chair. He picks up Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Reading two or three verses (Rom 13:13,14) his heart was searched and he was brought to faith in Christ. The great Augustine of Hippo.

The work of conversion goes on like that. Again and again! It's a spiritual miracle. Don't be overcome by your enemies. The very ones who persecute you may be the very ones in whom the Holy Spirit will work. The very people that the Holy Spirit may convince of sin; righteousness and judgement.

To people who are unconverted the Gospel, when read and preached, may be caused to speak to them by the Spirit. Through the Word and Spirit together. As they hear and intellectually may even come to know the truth and feel a sense of guilt, yet they do not feel that this God is their God; that this Christ is not their Christ; that this book is not their Bible; that these promises, they have not laid hold of. At this point they see a future – only of a Christ-less tomb. An eternity without God. This their conscience tells them because the Spirit is speaking through the Word. Convicting of sin. But at the same time showing Christ's life. Never a life like this! Never a man spoke like this man; no one else made a man born blind – see; nor raised somebody dead in a tomb for 4 days. The intellect recognises the uniqueness of Christ, knows He is who He say He is. The Spirit is speaking through the Word. Then of Judgement: they are told that if they remain as they are, even if they believe the truth, but never having 'laid hold' of the truth, they are, as yet still undone, because at this moment they are still without Christ.

The Spirit continues to speak: God's command is that they turn from sin (repent). That they finish and quit with everything that displeases God. That they cast themselves on Jesus Christ and serve Him and enjoy Him all their days and forever afterwards. The Spirit speaks to them through the word. The preacher can't bring them there. Thankfully the Holy Spirit can! And does.

A memory may remind them that they had a friend who had a great conviction of sin, or the record of John Bunyan's similar experience. Yet they say, "I've never had an

experience like that.” Why haven't they?

Some people are filled with a sense of shame. Time goes on and they continue to feel wretched and lost. But they never flee from that condition to Jesus Christ. That is not the conviction of sin, which is the work of the Holy Spirit. It may be remorse, conscience, it may be something left over from childhood, something to do with their upbringing, their sensitive nature or temperament, that they are so ashamed for so long. But unless that shame causes them to flee from sin to Christ, it's not the work of the Holy Spirit.

Some people have been less seriously cut. But nevertheless they have been sufficiently cut. Causing them to 'run to the physician' for their wounds to be bandaged. No such depths of despair like the others they have read about or seen in others, but it's been enough to make them run to Christ.

If this is you, then don't doubt your salvation, because you've never been in such despair. Because you're NOT saved by conviction of sin, rather you are saved by Jesus Christ.

When the Holy Spirit comes our Lord is saying here (verses 14 & 15) ¹⁴ *He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.* ¹⁵ *All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.* So the Holy Spirit doesn't just convince you of sin, righteous and judgement, but He unveils in your understanding, affections and need such that you choose the glorious Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some people today are saying that when the Spirit is at work, you'll speak in a language not your own. That is not the truth! Some people say that when the Spirit is at work, you'll have certain experiences or feelings. That's not necessarily the truth. But what is always true is that when the Holy Spirit is at work, He will unveil and glorify Jesus Christ.

So if you've had a work of the Holy Spirit in your life, you will have come to Christ and you will have believed on Christ. And this Christ is not a stranger to you. The promises that are offered are not just for others, but promises, that in your heart you have recognised, are for yourself.

Our Lord has said much that encourages us:

Our Lord gives promises. Tremendous promises. “When I'm gone”, says the Lord, “My Spirit will work in the world.” While, as we know, people will persecute Christians, people will never the less still be converted, because of the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will take the things of Christ and unveil them in peoples minds. It will happen after He's gone.

Then He says, “When I'm gone you'll see me again!” He wasn't just speaking about His resurrection: if today you are a Christian, you now 'see' Christ because of His ministry of His Spirit and the Word. Christ is not a stranger to you. “And you'll enjoy things.” He goes on to say. “You'll enjoy intimacy in prayer. You'll learn to ask and

learn to receive so that your joy will be full.” (verse 24)

Further, says Jesus, “You must remember that the Father in heaven is not a reluctant Father, who has to be bribed or pressurised to give good gifts to His children. He also loves you as I do. Therefore you will enjoy the experience of prayer: Asking and receiving from your heavenly Father, during the period of my absence.”

But then, He warns them that before all those things happen there is to be tribulation.

Persecution? Yes! The work of conversion? Yes!

Has there ever been a time when Christians have not been persecuted? No!

Has there ever been a time when the work of conversion has stopped? Never been a time!

But if you recognise that conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit. If you recognise (as you must do) that He being God is sovereign, the only way we will see more of the Spirit's activity is by addressing ourselves to God. More and more conversions will not **depend** on our being more fluent or have better methods or clever advertising.

Though these may be useful. Rather conversion **depends** on the Holy Spirit.

If you have a wish that so and so and such and such be converted, then they won't be converted without witnessing, but neither will they be converted without the Holy Spirit. So pray to God that the Holy Spirit will make you both a witness and will use your witness to convince them of sin, righteousness and judgement and to unveil to them the splendours and truth of the Christian Gospel – the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[2406]

May this be the case for all the saints gathered here today.

Then in the streets, still walking towards Gethsemane, our Lord stops, He lifts up His eyes to heaven and we have the wonderful prayer of Chapter 17. (next week)

John 17:1-26

The Greatest Prayer Ever Prayed

Per S Olyott

(Review of last time) -

While still in the streets of Jerusalem, walking towards Gethsemane, our Lord stops. He lifts up His eyes to heaven and we have this wonderful prayer of Chapter 17. Here we have today the most wonderful prayer the world has ever witnessed.

The Welsh have a lovely song. It's called "Trosgy Garreg"⁸, which means 'over the stone': A man stops on a hillside where there is an old stone. The stone looks down over a valley. As he sits by this stone he wonders about all the things this stone has seen: the courting couples that have come up on the hillside; the battles that have taken place in the valley. So he starts talking to this stone saying, "Oh stone, if you could only tell me of the things you have heard and seen through the centuries."

One could have a similar feeling when visiting an old historic chapel. What prayers must have been prayed here in this place. Oh if the pulpit could speak! What a privilege to hear such prayers that godly men have prayed.

But then comes the rebuke.

The greatest prayer that has ever been prayed does not require listening to a stone or a pulpit to tell what was prayed. The greatest prayer that the world has ever witnessed is recorded for us 'word for word' and we have it before us in Chapter 17!

You ought to be moved this morning just by the fact that we have this prayer. We're able to listen in to the Second Person of the Trinity, speaking to the First Person of the Trinity. We're able to listen in to a conversation by One Person in the Godhead to Another Person in the Godhead. Recorded word for word and written down and preserved.

If you're a Christian you should be particularly moved, because as you survey this prayer, a marvellous thought will strike you, if it hasn't already, that in this prayer Jesus

8 In English Verse by Alfred Perceval Graves. OVER THE STONE OVER THE STONE (Trosgy Garreg)

Over the stone, the old gray stone,
Let me ponder here alone,
Through all weather we go together
Ancient stone, thou good old stone.
Of the many friends I've seen,
Thou the truest friend has been,
Some forget me, some have fled,
Some are false, and some are dead,
Changing never constant ever,
Still I find thee, dear old stone.

Standing here, thou silent stone,
What a world thou must have known!
Deeds of glory, lost to story,
Hast thou witness'd ancient stone.
Here beneath the grass, 'tis said,
Many warriors bones are laid,
Fighting for their land they fell,
None but thou can truly tell.
Secrets keeping, ever sleeping,
Dream'st thou of the past, old stone?

prays for you!

It's true. Look at verse 20: ²⁰ *"I do not ask for these only, (meaning the 11 who were there as He prayed) but also for those who will believe in me through their word,...* , How did you come to believe? Through the testimony of other Christians. Who in turn came to believe from earlier Christians and so on back to the Apostles. How did you come to believe? Through the Apostolic Word. If you're a Christian you are one of those prayed for in verse 20.

That night just before His crucifixion Christ prayed for us. Knowing you. Not just an amorphous group of unknowns, as we shall see later.

Be humbled knowing that your name was in the Lord's mind when He prayed.

Things to notice in this prayer before we consider it in detail. Things that will help us in our own prayer life.

Notice that it was prayed outside: that simple point should be enough to show to you that you don't need any special place. Some people search for a special place – not necessary. Here in an ordinary unnamed street the Second Person of the Godhead converses with the First Person of the Godhead.

Notice that this prayer wasn't a liturgy: Our Lord didn't fish round in His first century pockets for a little book. Open it at the appropriate page and read the 'collect' for the day. But the Lord Jesus Christ opened His heart up to His heavenly Father. Six times He talks to Him as Father. When He taught us to pray he said, "Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven ... ' " (Matthew 6:9)

Prayer is not reciting lofty phrases to a heavenly proposition. Prayer is the opening of the heart of a child to a heavenly Father.

Then notice that this prayer wasn't lengthy: if you read it, oh so slowly, you'll still have less than 5 minutes reading. If you read at conversation speed – just over two minutes. The value of prayer isn't measured in its length, but in its weight. It's true that our Lord did pray sometimes, all night. And He was to pray again in the Garden of Gethsemane, repeatedly before this evening was out. But this wonderful prayer is not a lengthy prayer. A person may pray well and pray perfectly, without praying lengthily.

Also notice that the Lord wasn't alone when He prayed. He's left the upper room. He's walking to Gethsemane: there are 11 men with Him. He stops in the street. He's just been talking to them, answering their questions. It's in that situation that He stops and prays. Again it is true that our Lord tells us to find a quiet place on our own and to pray there. But do not think that you cannot pray, if there are people around you. The presence of people, even sinful people around us is not an inhibition to prayer. Perfect praying can still go on in company. That should be a tremendous reassurance to us. With people around us, even sinful blasphemous people, you can still lift your heart up and pray effectively to God. And when surrounded by the Lord's people, of course how much more wonderful it is to do it.

Yes we are encouraged to pray alone, but we do not have to be alone to pray.

Now notice that our Lord didn't kneel to pray: here He is talking to the disciples as He walks through the streets. He stops in His tracks, lifts up His eyes to heaven – He didn't even close them – and prays. No special posture and certainly no closing of the eyes is necessary for prayer. There's no encouragement for keeping your eyes open, but the point is that prayer is essentially the movement of the heart and everything else is secondary to this.

Finally – just before we look at the prayer – we note that here we have a human praying. It's true that it's God in the flesh, but it is a man praying. Some may say, “As long as I'm a man or a woman I cannot pray as I should”. True enough, but it's not the state of being human that affects the prayer. It's being sinful that is the hindrance to prayer.

A man has prayed perfectly on the earth! A man has prayed to an unseen God, perfectly. If you find prayer difficult or if you cannot pray at all. The problem is not your humanness. The problem is your sin.

The Prayer: It breaks easily into 3.

Verses 1-5: Our Lord prays for Himself.

Verses 6-19 : He prays for the eleven. The disciples who were believing on Him at that time.

Verse 20 onwards: All the other believers in the centuries to follow, right up to this present morning.

Now we consider the main features of the prayer.

Verse 1-5: He prays for Himself. There's a lesson in that. It's not wrong to pray for yourself. Even in the 'Lord's Prayer' we are taught to pray certain things for ourselves.

What our Lord prays in the first 5 verses can be summarised in one word: glorify (in verse 1). This is the theme of these verses. Glorify! Here in the street in Jerusalem, Jesus of Nazareth – God in the flesh – looks up to His heavenly Father – and the word He uses as He prays for Himself is glorify.

What did He mean? Well He tells His Father in verse 1, that the 'hour has come'. All through John's account we have been plotting the progress of 'the hour'. It's been getting nearer and nearer. It's the hour of the Cross. If our Lord does not now go to the Cross, but retreats. If our Lord does not, by death, defeat death, but backs off. If our Lord does not by death, destroy him that has the power of death⁹, but shrinks back. It will be a dishonour. If our Lord comes to this world to accomplish salvation for

⁹ The devil's power of death, springs from use of the fear of death as a weapon. This fear of death is removed for a believer since through Christ's death and resurrection – the first born of the dead – death is replaced by eternal life in Christ.

sinner, but does not proceed to 'the hour' and accomplish salvation it will be dishonour and disgrace.

So our Lord prays to His Father that the Father will glorify the Son, so that the Son may also glorify the Father. He's praying in fact that He will go to His Cross and go to the glory beyond the Cross. In that way He is praying that He will be upheld for this final part of His work. That He will not be disgraced but glorified. Therefore, so that the Father will be glorified.

Our Lord throughout His ministry – God though He was – was dependant on heavenly aid for everything that He did.

He goes on in verse 2 and 3 to talk about what the Father's intention for Him is: that is, to raise Christ to the highest place. And from that highest place Christ is going to be able to give eternal life to as many as the Father has given Him. This will be done by His bringing them to a true knowledge of God. So He says to His heavenly Father in verses 4 and 5, "Everything you have given me to do, I have done. Now I pray for the reward of my obedience. I pray that I may indeed be raised to the place – as a man – where I was before."

Our Lord had done everything: He'd been commissioned to live a perfect life on our behalf – He'd done so; He'd been commissioned to reveal the Father – He'd done so; He'd been commissioned to die in our place – and the Cross was now so certain that He could speak that He had done so!

Remember, our Lord's exultation – as a man, even now – is a result of His obedience. His entry into heaven is the reward for the perfect life that He has lived. It's from heaven that He dispenses, gives, eternal life, to as many as the Father has given Him. He's praying that all that will come to pass. That He may be glorified!

As we listen in to this prayer we learn that salvation is the work of the Triune God. It wasn't just the Lord Jesus Christ's initiative to save sinners; the Father sent Him and gave Him people He would save. It was the Lord Jesus who came to die, but He needed to be upheld in His work and ministry. The Father upheld Him. Not by coming Himself but by sending the Holy Spirit to uphold His Son. Therefore the work of saving you and me is the work of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

God the Father saves; God the Son saves; and God the Holy Spirit saves. So we bow and worship the Triune God as the God of salvation.

Verses 6 – 19:

Our Lord having prayed for Himself, prays for the disciples. How their hearts must have swelled as they listened. They had heard such wonderful things from Him just in the last half hour or so. In the upper room and then as they started walking in the streets of Jerusalem. Things that they would never forget. But to stand there in the street and to witness the Lord of Glory conversing with His heavenly Father was an unforgettable privilege. And to hear Him praying for them was equally unforgettable.

This passage is the body of the Chapter. Notice how Jesus describes these disciples. Verse 6: ⁶ *"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. To know God's 'Name' is to know who God is! In His essential character. "These people around me", says the Lord Jesus, as He prays to His Father, "I have taught them who You are. Here are men who know God." (That is the essence of Christian discipleship – that's what it's all about! He describes them also in verse 6 as people who have kept God's word: Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.*

The essence of Christian discipleship is to know God and to keep His word.

He goes on in verse 7 & 8, to explain that when the disciples looked at Christ they knew that everything that He said and every thing that He was and everything He did was because of the heavenly Father. They recognised the divine origin; the divine identity and the divine commission of Jesus Christ. They knew who He was.

Such people who know God; keep His Word; and know the truth about Christ, they belong to both the Father and the Son as verses 9 & 10 make clear. And their very existence brings glory to Christ. Here are these people walking the streets of Jerusalem who know who Christ is. They are able to speak true words about Christ. The very existence of such people (the end of verse 10) brings glory to Christ. That's how our Lord describes believers: they know God *ergo* they know Him. They love and keep His Word. Those are the great features of Christians. That's how you recognise a Christian: not by religious paraphernalia. [It's important that we understand how to recognise a Christian when we, later, come to the statement of "Christians being one"]

Why is it that there are certain people who know God? Follow in your Bible as we refer to a collection of verses in Chapter 17:

Verse 2 (at the end): *all whom you have given him*

Verse 6: speaks of people – *Yours they were, and you gave them to me*

Verse 9: ⁹ *I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.*

Verse 11: *which you have given me* again,

Verse 12: *which you have given me.*

Verse 24: *they also, whom you have given me,*

Six times in the chapter, Jesus uses the Name 'Father' for God and six times in the Chapter, Jesus describes Christians as people whom the Father has given to the Son. That's why there are people who know God. Before the world was made the Father gave certain people to the Son as a gift. And in time, God the Holy Spirit guarantees that they will come into the knowledge of God. That's why there are people who submit to God's Word. Before the world was made the Father gave, as a gift, certain people to the Son and in due time the Holy Spirit convinces them that this book we have here is God's Word.

A wonderful truth, that ever before even an angel existed, there was activity, between the Persons of the Godhead: the father gave certain men and women to His dear Son

and it was for those people as we also read in Chapters 6 and 10, that He came to live – He lived on their behalf; to die – He died in their place; and to rise again – He rose to save them for ever.

That none of them should be lost. All of them should come to be where He is now: in heaven.

This is in the prayer! That's how Christians are described.

[2566]

May this be the case for all the saints gathered here today.

Next week we will note another key word in verse 6 – 19: the 'world' and then continue to the end of Chapter 17.

The Greatest Prayer Ever Prayed – Pt 2

Per S Olyott

(Review of last time) -

Last time we began to consider Chapter 17 of John's Gospel. The words Jesus prayed in the presence of the eleven disciples out in a street of Jerusalem on the way to Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives.

He began (verses 1-5) with prayer for Himself: that God would be glorified by Christ being glorified. Due to His being assisted by the Father to complete the task He was sent to do: to finish His path to the Cross.

He then (verses 6-19) prayed for those disciples – the eleven – who were with Him. In so doing He once again showed the characteristics of a true Christian: a specific person given to Christ by the Father before the creation of the earth and time; a person who has been brought to a true knowledge of God; a person who has kept God's Word; a person who has been redeemed by the will of the Father, through the life and work of the Son; and being convinced (of sin, righteousness and judgement) by the Holy Spirit.

Now we come to look again at verses 6-19 to recognise the key word, 'world', in this part of the passage. Before going on to complete the chapter.

At least a dozen times 'world' is used.

Verse 6: Christians are people who are *out of the world*. We might use the expression 'out of this world' but that's not what our Lord means. Here is the world of humanity – all men and women, but some people are out of it. They are still very much on this 'globe'. They haven't gone off into inter-stellar space. But they have a distinct identity, so that they no longer belong. They're out of this world – set apart, from other people. The very people who are set apart in eternity are set apart in time – the here and now.

In verse 9 this is particularly clear: ⁹*I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.* There are only two sorts of people: those who are the world's, and those whom the Father has given to the Son.

Now we come to the great truth of: election and reprobation. Our Lord has had certain people to be chosen to be His, and in so doing it is chosen that others are 'passed over'. God has chosen certain people to be Christ's and in doing so has obviously passed over the others and left them to themselves. Our Lord says so. And our Lord prays only, in this prayer, for those whom the Father gave the Son. They're already known to Him, because He received them as a gift before the world was made. They are not an anonymous mass of people. Actual (named) men and women. Here He prays for them in this prayer.

Now the world hates these people (verse 14). Because they are not of the world.

They're different! Just as Jesus was different. Jesus doesn't pray for these people (verse 50) that they should be taken out of the world. But prays that they should be kept from the 'evil one'. So here is the wonderful truth that Christians are prayed for by Christ. But He doesn't pray that you should suddenly be transported into heaven this Sunday morning. Because the Lord wants the Christian life to be lived tomorrow, and the next day and so on. Lived at the workplace, the school, the university, the shopping centre, the men's shed and so on. Wherever men and women are found.

His prayer is not that you should be suddenly taken away – you'll go there at last! His prayer is that you shall be kept from the evil one. That you shall be holy in whatever you do. The Christian continues to live in the world: distinct, different, Christ-like. Our Lord is praying that.

Then in verse 18 He says that He has sent His people into the world, just as surely as He Himself was sent into the world. So even Paul has to accept that though His greatest wish was to be with Christ in heaven, (while that time would come by God's choice) for the time being, His work was to be done in the world. With Christ's prayer that He would be kept from evil. And so for all Christ's disciples. In the world but not of the world. To do Christ's work in the world. Kept from succumbing to evil by Christ's intercession. Sent into the world. The place where you are is not just where you happen to be. You are sent to it. God's providence arranged it. You were sent by Him. To be His ambassador, representative, spokesman and example.

The family in which you were brought up was where God has sent you to be.

In summary then, what Christ asks for – for Christians is in two phrases:

- (verse 11) ¹¹ *And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, **keep them in your name**, which you have given me, And verse 15: ⁵ *I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you **keep them from the evil one**.* Keep them distinct, different, Christ-like, Godly. **Keep them!***

And the second phrase is derived from verse 17:

- ¹⁷ **Sanctify them** ... Which means to be set apart for God. How are people sanctified? How do people become more spiritual? More Christ-like? More Godly? More and more obviously not one of this world? How does this happen?

¹⁷ *Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth* Listening to the Word being read and to the preaching of the Word, is part of the process of sanctification. Talking about God's Word. Memorising it. Reading it. Meditating on it. Submitting our mind and emotions to God's Word, is the means by which people are made holy. The means by which they are kept and sanctified. It's the means by which this prayer is answered.

These then were our Lord's two great petitions: **keep** and **sanctify**.
(Then there is a third petition which comes later in the closing section.)

Do you think that our Lord's prayers to His Father could or would be refused?

Sometimes you see someone who professes to be a Christian. Appears to make a good profession, but walks out on it. That person hasn't been 'kept'!

Could it be that our Lord's prayers are unanswered?

That's a blasphemous suggestion. The only explanation that we can have for this phenomenon, it that such people were never Christ's in the first place (like Judas). Never numbered and named in those persons the Father gave to the Son.

Equally you see a person who claims to be a Christian, who keeps on making a Christian profession to the end of their life, but is in reality no different from those of the world. Not holy. Not Christ-like. Not distinct. Not spiritually discerning. Not heavenly minded. With only one thing: a self ascribed label of 'Christian'. Could it be that any of the people whom the Father gave to the Son aren't sanctified? When Christ prayed for their sanctification! Every time you meet an un-sanctified person calling him or herself a Christian, then this is no Christian. Otherwise you must suggest that the Lord's prayers may not be answered.

Now we move to the last section of the prayer from verse 20, where our Lord, having prayed for Himself and the representative Christians believers that where with Him in that street and on that evening, He then prays for all disciples who are to follow. ²⁰ *"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ...*

They must have been tremendously encouraged, when the 11 heard the Lord pray that. In the previous chapter He's promised conversion. The Spirit will come. He will convince people of sin; righteousness; and judgement. So this part of the prayer would be the final thing that convinced these disciples. Hearing the Son of God , praying to the Father for the future people who were going to believe (to be converted – given a new birth).

As long as the world lasts, we are able to talk about those who are going to believe. We can always have that optimism. Tomorrow there will be more believers than there are today. Otherwise our Lord's prayer here is meaningless.

We are numbered in that number. The Lord was, in fact, praying for us.

Note what Jesus prays, for the people who are to become believers. Verse 21: ... *but also for those who will believe in me through their word,* ²¹ **that they may all be one,** ... Verse 22 ... **that they may be one** ... Verse 23 ... **they may become perfectly one,** A prayer that He had already prayed in verse 11: ... **that they may be one, even as we are one.**

Our Lord prays for His people, not only that they will be **kept** and **sanctified**, but He prays for their **unity**.

But be careful! In relatively recent times, particularly from 1945 onwards: there has been great emphasis on the 'ecumenical movement'. People have been saying clearly and dogmatically that it is a disgrace that there should be such things as Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant. It's a disgrace that there should be sects within the Roman Catholic Church. It's a disgrace that Protestants should be divided into Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Baptists and on and on. "It's a disgrace", they say! "Didn't our Lord pray that they should all be one?" "Therefore we must do everything in our power to get together." say these people. "To get together all professing Christendom. So that at last there is only one Church and every Church which calls itself Christian recognises every other Church which calls itself Christian. There must be an end to our division!"

They keep appealing to this passage. It's almost become their mantra.

Well then. Did our Lord's prayer go unanswered? Or not? That is the issue.

If our Lord were praying for a uniting of organisations, then His prayer until now has been unanswered! In such a case, for two thousand years the prayers of the Son of God have remained unanswered. They have been unavailing in heaven. That is an awful thought. Because He intercedes for you as a Christian. And if His prayer, to this point has been two thousand years unanswered, then who can tell if His other intercession: the one for you, has been successful.

Our Lord, in this passage was not praying for the unity of organisations.

Our Lord was praying for unity of individual persons. Consider verse 21: ²¹ *that they may all be one, **just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, ...*** . Again, at verse 22: *... that they may be one **even as we** (Father and Son) **are one, ...*** . Also, verse 23: *they may become perfectly one, ... **even as you loved me.***

Jesus prayed, not for the coming together of organisations. He prayed that individual Christians should have a relationship with individual Christians which is analogous with the relationship which exists between the Father and the Son. He prayed not for a unity of institutions, but a unity of life. A unity which would have a purpose: verse 22, *... so that the world may believe that you have sent me.* And verse 23, *... so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them ...* .

It is blasphemous that we should suggest that our Lord's prayer is unanswered.

It is a shame. A crying shame. That there are groups of people throughout the world who call themselves Christians who are not agreed. But it shouldn't surprise you. It was so, right from the beginning. Our Lord made it clear that our world would be filled with counterfeit Christianity, and that it would get worse as time went on. Until it would be almost impossible to find the real thing. This is the consistent teaching of the New Testament.

But. Here is a member of the Church of England, say. Here is a Baptist and even a

member of the Roman church. Each rests on Jesus Christ's life and death and resurrection alone. And nothing else – for his acceptance with God.

When such believers as these meet, in the words of an African pastor: “When the Jesus in me meets the Jesus in You, we say hello and shake hands.”

There is a meeting of spirit and although I possibly can't recognise his Church affiliation, and although there are points that I would want to take up with him. If he rests on Jesus Christ alone, and nothing else. If the Spirit of Jesus Christ is within him. If he knows God and Jesus Christ, whom God has sent giving eternal life. If he lives by God's Word. Then He is my brother!

And I recognise my union with him. Christ's prayer **is** answered.

One day we will be in heaven: thanks to the prayer of verse 24: *Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.* One day in heaven every believer who is a true Christian believer will be there. We shall see that from every place and every Nation a multitude are in heaven on the sole ground of Jesus Christ's righteousness and blood. This will be a great Church – perfectly united in its praise of Christ. The proof that God did send the Lord Jesus Christ and His prayer for this unity was answered as we knew it would be.

Chapter 17: A wonderful prayer. A prayer of the Son speaking to the Father. A prayer of the One who was uniquely loved talking to the One who uniquely loved Him.

Be amazed! There is One God. There are three Persons who are One God. Each Person in the God-head can be said to be “in” the Other. They are equal in honour and glory. They are bound together in a relationship of love and the relationship with each Other is active. There is active communication between the Persons of the Trinity within the One God-head.

But what is the theme of this Fellowship? What is the theme of their conversation? The theme of their conversation is their mutual glory. Which is brought to be recognised by the wonder of the salvation of sinners.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit converse together about the ones whom the Father gave to the Son. Whom the Spirit at last brought to faith. Father and Son converse together about those the Father gave to the Son. Father and Son and Holy Spirit converse together about us. About you and about me.

[2538]

May this be the case for all the saints gathered here today.