

**Sermon:** *A Glimpse Into Christ's Heart*  
**Scripture:** John 17:1-25  
**Speaker:** Pastor Dick High  
**Date:** January 1, 2006

### **Introduction:**

The last time that New Year's Day occurred on a Sunday was January 1, 1995. Because this morning we stand just inside the threshold of the New Year, I thought we would consider some of the predictions people have made for 2006. I have obtained the following from a number of sources:

Some predictions are quite general:

- The world population is predicted to reach 6.5 billion in 2006.
- Subdued economic performance will compel the Federal Reserve to ease up on the interest rate increases.
- One individual predicts a health care crisis.
- A more-active-than-usual 2006 hurricane season, but not quite as nasty as it was in 2005.

Some predictions are more specific:

- The Chicago Bears will win the Super Bowl.
- Dick Cheney will have a massive heart attack.
- George W. Bush will become very ill and out of commission for several weeks.
- Osama bin Laden will be found and captured.

Other predictions take us into the scientific or technological world:

- As part of its ongoing agreement with NASA, Google will secure exclusive advertising rights to the moon, where it plans to run text ads on the lunar surface. To increase traffic, the search company will distribute free telescopes to every human on the planet.
- Hollywood's Movielabs Research & Development center will announce a breakthrough technology that erases viewers' memory of a film; patrons will forget they saw a movie and pay for it all over again.
- The self-diagnosing automobile is unveiled. Every morning at 2:00 am, your car will run complete mechanical diagnostics on itself, including tire pressure as well as tire and brake wear. If there's a problem, your car will send you an e-mail and tell you where it hurts.

The final group of predictions I mention relate to Biblical subjects:

- Annie Stanton predicts that a 14.4 mile long asteroid will collide with the earth. Jesus will arrive and a 1000 year period of peace will start.
- Michael Drosnin, in his book *"The Bible Code II"* states that *'atomic holocaust' and 'World War' are both encoded in the Bible. And both are encoded with the same year, 2006.*
- According to the *Sunday Times* in England, a religious group called *"The Family"* anticipates the end of the world in 2006. *"Members are said to be stockpiling food and planning to hide in caves in India."*
- According to one email the writer believes that "666," the number of the beast mentioned in the biblical book of Revelation, is really a date: 06/06/06. He expects the rapture and start of the tribulation on that date.

These various predictions may be considered anything from intriguing to humorous or inane. Some are beyond my scope of interest and even those that deal with Biblical subjects I in no way consider prophetic. Ira Stanphill, gospel songwriter of the last century, well summarizes my thoughts as I think about 2006. In the chorus of his hymn "I Know Who Holds Tomorrow" he writes these words:

*Many things about tomorrow, I don't seem to understand; but I know who holds tomorrow, and I know who holds my hand.*

With those words as our backdrop, I invite you to open your Bibles to John 17.

Today's passage from Scripture gives us one of the more personal glimpses into the heart of Christ in the Gospels. It is in its entirety a prayer, recording some of the final words of Christ that the disciples would hear prior to his arrest. Its focus is primarily on the future, both immediate and extended. It is because this prayer looks forward that I selected it for our sermon text this first day of 2006.

We will actually read through the entire chapter during the course of today's message. But prior to reading any of it, I want to speak briefly to the significant context of John 17. From that context I will focus on four items.

### **Significant Context**

First, there is the matter of timing. All of John 13-17 occurs in the Upper Room surrounding the final Passover meal that Jesus shares with his disciples. Let me read the first verse of chapter 13: *It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. On five previous occasions in this Gospel, John records Christ's words that that time had not come. Now it had. Christ stands on the threshold of events which have eternal implications. There had never been, and never would be again, such a time in history.*

This is a time of concentrated teaching. If you read in a red letter edition of the New Testament, most of these chapters are in red type (signifying the words of Christ). Other portions of the Gospels may look similar, but in most instances that is teaching that would be scattered over a broader timeframe. Of specific note regarding what Christ teaches here is his instruction about the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell believers.

Woven throughout these chapters Christ gives repeated reminders of and encouragement for their need of trust in him. The most direct statement is in John 14:1 – *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.* Numerous occasions throughout the other chapters the need for faith is implicit. So much is going to change for these disciples. They are going to have to trust in his words without the reinforcement of his physical presence. We could say that as he “steps away,” their faith will need to “step up.”

Finally, and by way of emphasis, the text itself reminds us that this is a time of transition. Please note the first sentence as I read from John 17. The text will appear on the screen, or you may follow in your own Bible.

### **Jesus Prays for Himself**

*1After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. 2For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. 3Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

*4I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. 5And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. In*

At this critical time of transition Christ not only instructs his disciples, he also prays.

## Three Concentric Circles

From a bird's eye view, we can observe three areas of focus within this prayer. Using an image of concentric circles helps me visualize the progression. The inner circle, verses 1-5, is Christ's prayer for himself. The next circle, verses 6-19, is Christ's prayer for his immediate disciples. The outer circle, verses 20-26, is Christ's prayer for all believers. (That circle actually includes us. Granted, it is not by name, but Christ did pray for us in the final portion of his prayer.)

Let's take a few minutes to walk through this prayer. In the initial section Christ prays for himself (verses 1-5): We could spend significant time here; I will only highlight two requests that Christ makes here.

One request is glorification for him (for himself). The other request is glorification for his Father. Both requests are complimentary and interwoven. I believe we can best understand these requests as we understand the word "glorify."

The word is used five times in the first five verses. Its Old Testament background is built around the concept of weightiness or importance. At its root it deals with reputation or renown. It can be translated as "give praise to," "honor," "magnify," or "exalt." In specific reference to God it speaks of his splendor, majesty, and radiance. I understand Christ's specific request here to be his stated desire that the full character of both he and his Father be on display in the coming hours. It is a request that God's love, mercy, justice, forgiveness, compassion, righteousness, sovereignty, splendor, and majesty be unabashedly and perfectly demonstrated through the arrest, trials, suffering, crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Christ. It is a request that all that God is be observable with extreme clarity at this most critical time in of all history. As a result both Christ and his Father would be given praise and honor, they would be exalted and magnified.

Philippians 2 helps us grasp that in all eternity previous to the incarnation, the perfect, pure, intimate relationship between God the Father and God the Son involved a perpetual, unbridled display of God's glory. Christ had willfully set that aside, but was soon to return to it. Christ anticipates and longs for that return, but also realizes the path to that is through the cross. That path will not only allow him to be glorified, it will also allow his Father to be glorified! But because that path will lead through the most extreme of circumstances and experiences, Christ knows of his need for prayer. Understanding the realities of what Christ will face makes it clear that there is nothing selfish about this prayer. We also see that this prayer is not self-focus, because in verse 6 Christ turns his attention to his disciples.

### Jesus Prays for His Disciples

*6*"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. *7*Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. *8*For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.

*9*I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. *10*All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. *11*I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one.

*12*While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. *13*"I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.

*14I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.*

*15My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. 19For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.*

I invite our attention to three specific requests from this portion of Christ's prayer:

**Protection:** Beginning in verse 6 Christ rehearses some of the privileges that these men have enjoyed through their relationship with him. God had entrusted these men to Christ (verse 6) and Christ had shared himself with them, revealed the Father to them, taught them God's words, guided them in obedience, brought them to a point of conviction about himself (his identity), and protected them. But he was soon to leave them and thus asks God to continue to protect them (see the middle of verse 11). "Protect" has a breadth of meaning from "never lose sight of" to "watch over," "preserve," and "guard." In context it is spiritual protection for which he asks; protection of their unity (verse 11) and against Satan's work to turn them from followers to enemies (verse 12 and 15).

**Joy:** In chapter 16 Jesus acknowledges that these men face a time of great sorrow. In John 16:20 he states, *I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.* These men are still coming to an understanding of his death, and the suffering that surrounds it. They will scatter, face confusion, and experience fear. But then Christ will rise from the dead. He knows that. And he knows how all that will impact them. The prayer request in John 17:13 is that they learn of and experience the joy that Christ himself knows and experiences. That would involve the joy of relationship with the Father, the joy of obedience, and the joy of perspective (Hebrews 12:2 – *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross...*)

**Sanctification:** *Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth* (verse 17). This is a prayer for their spiritual growth and maturity. Christ here prays that these disciples will be drawn further into a relationship with the Father, that they will increasingly reflect the work of the Holy Spirit in their life, that they would increasingly embrace the truth of God's word so that they would demonstrate righteous living. It is because Christ knows they cannot accomplish this alone that he prays for such a work of God in their life. His prayer reveals an interest in and concern for what occurs in their life after his departure.

There is one final portion of Christ's prayer to consider; it begins at verse 20.

### **Jesus Prays for All Believers**

*20"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:*

*23I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 24"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.*

*25"Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. 26I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."*

Very briefly, please note:

Christ prays for the unity of believers. That request is stated in verse 21 and verse 23. Tracing the life of the disciples through the Gospels evidences the fact that even when there were only twelve, they jockeyed for position, there were different levels of commitment, and they evidenced individualism. As the number of disciples would expand, the need for unity would be equally important; and more challenging to accomplish. Christ prayer is for a pervasive unity – *that all of them would be one*. That is a unity with depth, intimacy, and which bears witness to the life-changing power that Christ’s love can bring.

Christ also prays that our relationship with God would be vibrant and intimate. That relationship occurs through Christ and his work of forgiveness. It is something we as believers can experience now and into eternity. See verse 21 – *May they...be in us...* and verse 24. *...I want those you have given me to be with me where I am...*

Let’s pause for just a minute to reflect. This is Christ’s desire and prayer for each of us in our relationship with himself and his Father!

Recently read an individual’s recollection from their childhood of being lost at the mall. They found a policeman and asked him for help in finding his parents. After searching together for some time, the child asked through their tears, “Do you think we will ever find them?” The policeman replied, “I don’t know kid. It’s a big mall, and there are so many places *they* can hide.”

God wants to be “found!” He invites us to relationship with himself. He desire that our relationship be vibrant and intimate. That is what Christ prays for here!

Christ also prays that we would experience God’s infinite love. Verse 26 - *...in order that the love you have for me may be in them...* Christ desires that as he has known and experienced his Father’s love, so too would we! I believe the essence of this prayer is expanded in Ephesians 3:17ff. *And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

## Looking Ahead – Prayer Foundations for 2006

It’s time to step back and reflect. As we do so I want to suggest that the items about which Christ prayed are substantial issues about which we should pray for one another. If you carry away from today’s message nothing more than the identification of these issues, **and** make a commitment to regularly pray for those matters either in the life of family members, fellow participants in a Bible study or small group, those in your Adult Bible Fellowship, or your Sunday school students if you are a teacher, you will have made a very practical application of this passage of Scripture.

Here is an initial list that I have compiled:

- Pray that we would glorify God.
- Ask God for spiritual protection.
- Pray that we would know Christ’s joy.
- Pray that we would desire and pursue spiritual growth (This request is stated both in Christ’s prayer for our sanctification and in his prayer that we our relationship with God grow in depth and intimacy.)
- Ask God to work so as to develop and/or maintain unity within our church.
- Pray that we would grasp the extent of God’s love.

I realize that creating such a list is the easier part of this challenge. Incorporating those subjects regularly into your prayer life will require ongoing commitment. It is that commitment that I am encouraging today. (If you've written these items on your outline then I would suggest keeping them inside your Bible. I've written them on a 3x5 ruled index card that I can tack up next to my desk.)

As we consider these suggested areas for prayer, perhaps a more basic issue might be our motivation. Christ's prayer itself addresses the matter of motivation. The conversation I observe in John 17 reveals an intimate relationship between Christ and his Father. Prayer is the activity in which significant aspects of that intimacy develop. When I understand my identity as his child, as I experience his love for me, as I learn of his desire for me to know him, as I respond to his request that I cast every care upon him and that I seek him to supply all my needs, then I am drawn to spend time with him. An understanding of my identity in Christ impacts my motivation for prayer. Prayer is my privilege as a believer.

I would call that "pull" motivation; it is motivation that pulls or draws me toward prayer. But there is also what I call "push" motivation; certain realities that should drive or propel me toward prayer.

This prayer of Christ identifies the **need** of every believer for spiritual protection. It also highlights the **need** we have for God to accomplish unity amid our diversities. And it reminds us of the **need** we have for God to accomplish his work of sanctification in our life. I need to pray! You need to pray! That reality is clearly evident in Christ's prayer in John 17.

There is one other motivation for prayer that I observe. The words recorded here were spoken 2,000 years ago. I suggest God is still answering that prayer! It motivates me to know that the impact of prayer can far exceed our expectations or perspective.

I ask your attention for one final application. At the beginning of study in John 17 I counted the number of times the pronoun "I" is found in this chapter. I count 29 times. When I compare that with other passages in the Gospels, that number is quite high. Part of what I conclude is that John 17 is a very personal prayer of Christ. This prayer provides "A Glimpse Into Christ's Heart." It was not until I was nearly finished with my study that I read through the chapter again and made another count. I was looking for the use of the words "they," "them," and "those." I was amazed to see that the total usage for those words was 45 times! Not only is John 17 a very personal prayer of Christ, it also is clearly a prayer for others; **always using plural words.**

I believe Christ's prayer occurred in the presence of the disciples. God's desire is not only that we pray for our fellow believers, but that we also pray with our fellow believers. Community is an important focus for prayer and an important context in which prayer occurs. In the next seven days there are three corporate opportunities for us to participate in prayer for and with fellow believers. There is our weekly Wednesday evening prayer time. On Thursday we have a Day of Prayer. And next Sunday morning, at 8:15 you join those who pray for our Sunday ministries. And whether you feel "pulled" or "pushed," I want you to know you are welcome.