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## *Eavesdropping: Unify Them*

John 17:20-26

Good morning Chapel Hill! My name is Ellis White and I am a Pastoral Intern here. Just before we start, I want to share something really embarrassing.

The other day, I was in the public restrooms, and just as I had sat down, a voice from the next cubicle said, 'Hi! How are you?'

A little embarrassed, I said, 'I'm doing fine. Thanks.'

The voice said, 'So what are you up to?'

I said, 'Just doing the same as you, sitting here!'

Then he said, 'Can I come over?'

Now, I'm getting kind of annoyed at this point, so I said, 'Err... I'm rather busy right now.'

Then the voice said, 'Listen, I will have to call you back, there's an idiot next door answering all my questions.'

The funny thing is... since we know that the NSA has been tracking all our phone calls, the entire White House is now probably laughing at this Englishman's stupidity... Good thing it wasn't a true story!

Eavesdropping. We all do it, even if we won't admit it! We're in our last week of a 3-week series called *Eavesdropping*. We've been eavesdropping in on Jesus' prayer to his heavenly Father in John 17. We've heard Jesus pray that he would be glorified, that his followers would be protected, and today we're going to hear him pray that his followers would be unified. Unity... that's what Jesus is praying for today. Let's read John 17:20-26.

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

*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.*

*Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I 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.*

So Jesus begins in v. 20 by telling us whom he is praying for. Up until now he has been praying for himself, and his disciples—those who were in the room with him. But now, he widens it out... He says, 'My prayer is not for them alone, I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.' Jesus is praying for all those who believe in Him, everywhere, at all times. Who's he praying for? You! If you believe in Jesus, these words are for you.

And this is what he prays: 'that all of those who believe in Him may be one;' that they may be brought to complete unity. Unity. I've thought a lot about what that means these past few weeks. Some Christians seem to think it means we should all just accept everyone's beliefs, so long as they claim to be Christian—in England we'd say, 'Let's all just drink tea and eat cake and get along;' or in America, Rodney King would say: 'Can we all just get along.' Others think it means that you have to be part of our particular church or you're not part of the Church—it's our way or the highway.

But what does Jesus tell us unity is? Well... there are three things Jesus' prayer teaches us about unity: the cause of unity; the nature of unity; and, the purpose of unity.

First, the cause of unity. Verse 22 tells us: 'I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one.' Two weeks ago, Pastor Mark preached on the glory that the Father gave to Jesus. He told us how glory isn't like Beyoncé on the Super Bowl stage with lights, fireworks and screaming fans. No... When Jesus says back in v. 1 'My hour has come, glorify me,' the glory Jesus asks for is his death on the cross, and his resurrection. That's the glory that this passage is talking about.

The intro video illustrated for us the disunity in this world—the division, the separation—and how we long for unity. The reality is, that we are all separated from God, and there is nothing that we can do to bridge that gap. We've all tried: work harder, pray more, be a better person. But we're always left with this deep feeling of separation. God is the only one who can reunite us to himself. And God chose to do that through Jesus in his life, death and resurrection.

Jesus, who was perfectly united with God, because he was God, came to earth in the form of a man and voluntarily took upon himself separation from God. And when Jesus, upon that cross, cried out, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,' he was voicing a cry that all of humanity has felt throughout the ages. Jesus took the disunity upon himself, and in his moment of glory, he gave us the unity he had with God. It was a beautiful exchange: our disunity, for his unity. But that wasn't the end. Death couldn't defeat Jesus—the Author of Life. And in one resounding victory, Jesus not only made a way for humanity to be united again with God, but he himself, remained united with God, rising to victory.

And more than this, Jesus' death and resurrection didn't just make a way for humans to become reunited with God. It made a way for humans to become reunited with themselves, with their work and with one another... So when Jesus says in v. 22 that he has given those who believe in Him that same glory so that we may be one, that means that Jesus' death and resurrection was his gift to believers that they may be one; that the Church may be united to one another—just as Jesus is united with the Father. That's the cause of unity: Jesus' work in his death and resurrection. Not our efforts at becoming unified. Jesus' finished work. This is super-important. Jesus has already brought unity. We don't have to, [but we do have to live into it. It's now and not yet. Like our salvation, we're saved, but we're still living into it. So...] The Church is one. But what does unity look like? What's the nature of unity?

The nature of unity is spread all over this passage... verse 21: 'I pray that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us...' Verse 22: '...that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me.' Wow! That hurts my head... In you, in us, in me... But I think it boils down to this: whatever unity looks like for Jesus and the Father, that's what unity looks like for the Church... Let me explain.

In verse 21, Jesus is praying that the relationship between the Father and the Son will be the same as the relationship between God and the Church—that as the Father and Son are one, so God and the Church will be one. That means that the Church can only be one, if it is in God. This is completely different from being united around a common cause like Greenpeace or PETA... Jesus prays for the church to be one, in God. And the Church is in God, through the work of Jesus on the cross. That's the glory part. The Church is in God through Christ, and so the Church is one.

Not only that, but in verse 23, Jesus prays, 'I in them.' Jesus is telling us that He longs to be in the Church, and now we know that through his death and resurrection, He is in the Church. And Jesus is in the Church by his Holy Spirit. God himself lives inside his Church and unites it together. So just like the Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son; the Church is in God, and God is in the

Church. The Church is in God through Christ, and God is in the Church through his Holy Spirit. And that is what makes the Church one. That is what unites the church. That is what unity looks like.

Now you might think this is hippy talk. How can two things both be in each other? It is kind of crazy, and so to help explain it, I'd like to invite up my wife... This is Rachel, and we've been married nearly three years now. And Rachel is the best person I know to illustrate what two things being in one another looks like. Because inside Rachel is our daughter—you can see a picture of her on the screens! So our daughter, we are not calling her Snow by the way, is in Rachel. But here's the amazing thing: Rachel is right now in our daughter. Our daughter is surviving off of Rachel's life: her oxygen, her food, and even her waste products—sorry baby girl! Literally: our daughter is in Rachel, and Rachel is in our daughter... In a similar way: the Son is in the Father, and the Father is in the Son; and the Church is in God, and God is in the Church. Thanks Rachel.

But here's the most important thing: this isn't just about me being in God and God being in me. And Susie being in God, and God being in her. And Tommy being in God and God being in him. No! It's about all the Church together, all the believers everywhere being in God and God being in them. This is not an individual thing... This is a community thing. God is in everyone in the Church all at once, and we are all in Him. And since God is in all the Church, every member of the Church is united one to another. That is what unity looks like.

But here's a big problem people—especially people my age—have with the nature of Church unity: If the Church is united in God, why are there so many denominations? Why does the church divide and split itself into so many parts? Well can I ask a question back...? Why do we often talk about God as if he were divided into three separate people? If he is divided, why can't God just get rid of his divisions and be one and work together?

You see, to think about God in this way, is to not understand him. The Father and the Son are equal, but they are distinct. Jesus dies on the cross for our sins, but the Father doesn't. But they are not divided. They have distinctions, not divisions. And remember what the nature of unity is like? It is like the nature of God... Denominations can be distinct without being divided, because they are united in God. You can have unity without having uniformity.

Think about it like this. The United States is made up of 50 different... colonies... I mean states. And some things within the Church are like state boundaries. We believe in ordaining women, the PCA, the Presbyterian Church in America, doesn't. We believe in infant baptism, the Baptists don't. These are state boundaries. And just like with states, if we see Oregon doing something that Washington wouldn't do, we don't go and attack them or seek to kick them out of the union... because this is the United States.

But then there are other things that are like country boundaries. Like we believe that Jesus is God. Another religious group may believe that Jesus is not God. That's a country boundary. State boundaries and country boundaries.

But it is key to remember how Jesus describes the nature of unity. The Church is united in God—that is, in Christ. So it is only those people who are in Christ, who have put their faith in His saving work, that are united. And here is one of the things we love about our denomination, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church... they clearly define what it means to be in Christ. And if we can know what it means to be in Christ, then it is much easier to be united in Christ.

So the Church is one because of Christ's work on the cross and in the resurrection. That's the cause of unity. And the Church is in God through Christ, and God is in the Church through the Spirit. That's the nature of unity. And for some of you, you love this. This is deep theological stuff. But others of you are sitting there going: so what? What's the point?

What's the purpose of unity? Jesus asks that believers would be united, so that the world may believe. Look at verse 21: 'that the world may believe that you have sent me'—that the world may believe the Father sent the Son; and, verse 23: 'to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me'—to let the world know that the Father sent the Son and loved the world just like He loved the Son.

The purpose of unity is not for the Church. It is for those outside the Church. The Church is to be one, so that the world, that's those who have rejected God, that they may come to believe. Believe that Jesus was sent by God on a rescue mission, and believe that God loves them. Unity isn't about some holy huddle that just hides in the corner, or a group of people who just try to blend into the culture to try and remain unified. It's not about hiding or blending, unity is about the Church being the body of people who God has sent into this world to show what it looks like to be re-united with God, and to be re-united with one another.

Unity is about showing the world the unity that God intended from the beginning... the harmony, the peace. Showing them that they can still have that. That they can have that in Christ. The purpose of unity is missional. That the world might come to believe. And let's be honest: it is mission critical. When people see disunity in the church, it is repulsive. Church arguments are poisonous. Church splits are disastrous. These things repel people from God's people, and so... from God.

And as I was thinking about this sermon, Rachel asked me, 'What do you think are the things that seek to cause disunity at Chapel Hill?' And we discussed it for a while, and of course we came up with theological things like infant baptism, homosexuality, women in leadership. But do you know what we realized... Chapel Hill really doesn't have some of the things that seek to bring disunity that other

churches have. We don't have gossiping, or worship wars, or power mongering among elders and deacons. Chapel Hill really is a sweetheart church. That's because even though we may have different convictions on theological issues, we are one in what matters most: our need for Jesus, what God has done for us in him, and what God is making of us together.

But the real question we need to ask ourselves is this: if the purpose of unity is that the world may believe, is the world seeing our unity? The world longs for unity... The world experiences sickness and disease in people's bodies. The world experiences disjointed, divided emotions. The world argues with one another, it fights, it has divorce attorneys. The world struggles with work, it doesn't feel like a natural extension of who people are, but somehow separated from them. And the world longs for a relationship with someone who won't let them down, who won't forsake, who will always be there. The world longs for unity. And who has God given the task of showing the world what unity looks like? The Church.

That's the mission of the Church: to show the world what it looks like to be re-united to God and to each other through Christ's work and the Holy Spirit's power. And how will the world see it? Well... one of the best ways for someone to see it, is to allow them to taste it, to invite them in. That's what happened to me.

I love being a part of a team. For me, it was always a rugby team. My favorite team that I was a part of was my team I played with from age 12-18. It was a fantastic group of guys. We would put ourselves on the line for each other on the field, and we would have a very fun time off of it. But here's the thing: it lacked substance. There was no real depth of relationship. It was real surface level. And more than that, I felt like my relationships with them were dependent on my performance: not just on the field, but in my ability to drink copious amounts of alcohol. I spent all my time trying to be liked by them.

At this time I knew who Jesus was, but I didn't allow that to affect my life, and I didn't go to church. Then one day, at a party, when I was a little worse for wear, a friend of a friend invited me to church. Do you know what? I'd met this girl a few months back and found out she went to church, and I really wanted to go. But for whatever reason, I felt like I couldn't go unless I was invited. And now I'd been invited! I couldn't wait.

So I began attending this church, and then I joined a LifeGroup and do you know what I found: unity. Real unity. People who loved each other because they knew Jesus loved them. People who would listen and share their life. It was so attractive! It was what I had been searching for in a rugby team. And I'd finally found it! And the reason there was real unity, was because they were all in Christ, and Christ was in them. He was the reason for their unity. And it's because of that group of young men and women that I stand before you today. That experience changed my life. I finally started allowing my beliefs to affect the way I live.

So if you are here, and you want that unity, I really want to encourage you: get plugged in at Chapel Hill. This is a church of real unity because we are united in Christ. There are people here who will love you because Jesus loves you. Come experience it. Join a LifeGroup: there's a board in the lobby with more information. Come to Men's Life or Women's Life starting in September. Come to Celebrate Recovery on Thursday nights. Come and taste and see the unity there is here.

But if you have already experienced some of that unity in Christ at Chapel Hill: invite someone in—someone who doesn't go to church, someone who needs to experience the unity that we have to offer in Christ. Invite them to your LifeGroup. Bring them along to Celebrate Recovery. Bring them to Men's Life or Women's Life. Invite them to our upcoming Oxford NW series called Hot Topics. Invite someone to taste and see.

Unity is real, and it is here in Christ. The world is crying out for it! They are longing for it. But they aren't going to see it unless we show it to them. So Chapel Hill, invite them in. Show them what they are desperate for. Let them taste and see. Because this is not something we should keep to ourselves. This is a gift from God to the whole world. Let's be a part of giving it to them!

## **Sermon Questions**

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
  1. What is the cause of unity (v. 22)? What does this mean for the unity of believers?
  2. What does unity look like (vv. 21-23)?
  3. What is the purpose of unity (vv. 21, 23)?
  4. What can you do to show the world a greater unity in the Church?