

Chapter Five: Beholding the Glory of Jesus

In this last chapter, I would like to take a look at God's general and grand purpose for the body of Jesus Christ, the church. I believe that his purpose for us is summed up in John 17:20-24. In these verses Jesus prays to the Father, "Neither pray I for these [apostles] alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou has sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom though hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which though hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." These five verses tell us what Jesus' desire is for the body of believers, his church. In other words, these verses communicate to us the general purpose of God for us as the body of Jesus Christ. In the previous chapter, we mainly looked at God's purpose for us as individual believers. In this chapter, we are looking at God's purpose for us as the corporate body of believers in his Son Jesus Christ.

In particular, I would like to mention three things that Jesus desires for his church with regards to his prayer in John 17:20-24. First, we learn that Jesus desires that we become one in the Father and himself so that we might be made perfect in one. Next, we learn about Jesus' desired method of evangelizing the world, namely, that through us becoming one, the world would come to believe that God the Father sent Jesus into the world. Finally, these verses tell us that it is Jesus' desire that we as a perfect body be with him where he is so that we might behold his eternal glory.

The result of learning what Jesus' desire is for his church is that we are thereby taught what our own desire should be as the

church of Jesus Christ. We have received Jesus' glory and we are greatly and perfectly loved by the Father and the Son. Oh, what glory there is in us having the same mind and desires as the Son of God! Oh, what glory there is in us being one and the same with the Father and the Son!

To be more specific, we should first desire to become one body, perfect in love for one another in the Father and the Son. Next, it should be our desire that our oneness with each other be able to communicate to the world that God the Father has indeed sent his Son Jesus into the world to be the Savior of the world. Finally, we learn that it should be our desire to be with Jesus Christ where he is so that we might behold his eternal glory face to face. It is my intention to spend the rest of this chapter briefly looking at these three desires of the body of Jesus Christ.

To begin with, it should be our desire to become one in Jesus Christ. Jesus likens his church to a family, calling those who believe in him the children of God and brothers. (Luke 20:36, Hebrews 2:12, and also Galatians 3:26 for a reference from Paul) Jesus became a man so that he could make a family among mankind. (Hebrews 2:13-14) In Jesus' family, all members have all things in common and the strong take care of the weak. (Acts 2:44, Acts 4:32, and 1 Corinthians 12:18-27) In Jesus' family, the greatest is the least and the least is the greatest. (Luke 22:25-27) In Jesus' family, there are no divisions or schisms, for all members know him and know that he is the essence of our very existence. (1 Corinthians 12:25 and 1 John 5:20) He is in us and we are in him. (1 John 4:15-16) So, with all of this in mind, it should only be natural for us to want to become one and united.

God has given us the freedom in Jesus Christ to make our own decisions and live according to the wonderful liberty that he has bestowed upon us. It is through this liberty that we can serve one another by love. As we saw in the preceding chapters, love is the bond of perfection in Jesus Christ. It is only reasonable, therefore, to assume that all of those who believe in him love one

another. It is through our love for one another that we become one.

At this point, I would like to draw a distinction here between what I mentioned in the preceding chapters and what I am talking about now. On one hand, I am still talking about us loving each other, but on the other hand, the scale of this love has increased to not only include our own churches, but the whole church of Jesus Christ in general.

The whole church of Jesus Christ includes all of those who believe in Jesus Christ the Savior. Jesus Christ is what we have in common and this commonality surpasses all things regardless of what they might be. Yea, let it be nationality, race, gender, family, culture, social-status, financial-status, education and so on, Jesus is greater. Not only this, but our commonality in Jesus Christ surpasses our denominational divides. Let's just think about something for a second: if we really believe that whoever believes in Jesus has everlasting life, 99.9% of the disagreements in our churches would cease. We would be so overwhelmed in our Savior Jesus that love would just flow out of our hearts for one another. We would know nothing other than him and talk about nothing other than him. His songs would be on our lips all day and we would long for fellowship with anyone who also knows him as Savior.

To give a specific example of the love that creates oneness among us, I would like to talk about the idea of unrelated churches loving one another. (When I say unrelated churches, I am not referring to churches that are dangerously heretical, cultic, and just plain-out unbiblical. Rather, I am talking about mainstream and biblical churches that may, for example, hold different denominational ties, affiliations, or slightly different doctrinal teachings.) To be specific, if we really saw one another as brothers and sisters simply for the fact that we all believe in Jesus, I really believe that there would be less emphasis on planting and growing churches and more emphasis on helping and healing existing churches. I often wonder why there are so many church plants and

so many new church strategies being implemented in areas where churches have long been established. Do we really believe that God wants something new? Do we really believe that God is looking for better methods to grow his church? Do we really think that God prefers quantity over quality? I don't think so. Let me just say that God has no pleasure in churches competing for their own survival. He has no pleasure in churches adopting new methods so that they can experience "growth." Jesus Christ is the only method and God the Father is only interested in faith in Jesus Christ that works by love. It astounds me that there are so many missionaries working overseas trying to establish churches where they already exist. Wouldn't it be better to help the churches that already exist? Wouldn't love much rather prompt us to go and help struggling churches just because they go by the name of Jesus Christ? Aren't these weak churches full of the least of Jesus' brethren? There is much more honor in trying to help and heal that which is sick and broken and ready to die than there is in starting something new. Just think about it, Jesus Christ came into the world to save that which was sick and broken and ready to die. He did not throw away the human race and just start over. It should be the same with us. We should prefer to heal rather than to destroy.

I realize that it may sometimes be necessary to establish new churches where they already exist. In Revelation 2 and 3, Jesus makes it clear that it is possible for a church to fall so far that it in fact dies. However, it is not the heart of Jesus Christ to destroy. Jesus Christ would much rather see his churches revive strength and live than just pass away in death. He would much rather have us work for the healing of his churches than to just throw them away and start over with bigger and better plans. To make clearer and give support for what I am trying to say, I would like us to take a look a passage of scripture from the Old Testament. It is found in Exodus 32:7-14 and 32:30-35.

“7 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy

people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: 8 They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. 9 And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: 10 Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation. 11 And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? 12 Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. 13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever. 14 And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people...30 And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the LORD; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin. 31 And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. 32 Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written. 33 And the LORD said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book. 34 Therefore now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee: behold, mine Angel shall go before thee: nevertheless in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them. 35 And the LORD plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron

made.”

In this story, we see at that the Lord was so angry with his people because of their sin that he wanted to destroy them. He says to Moses, “Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.” Thus, it was the will of the Lord to destroy this nation of people and start over again. Moses had heard the voice of the Lord. He had heard the Lord's will. He had received his vision and calling to be the leader of a new and great nation. Who can resist the will of the Lord? Who would be foolish enough to disobey? The voice of the Lord is clear in this passage. Moses calling is to be done with this worthless bunch of misfits and to become the leader of a much better nation. We would think that Moses would humbly accept his calling and vision; however, what happens next is quite to the contrary. Moses does not accept, but rather unhesitatingly challenges the Lord to spare his people and forgive them. Moses beseeches the Lord for mercy. Moses knows that the people are sick and broken and ready to die, but he pleads for them with all of his heart. It is as if he says to the Lord, “Don't make a new nation, but heal and forgive the nation that you already have.” Not only this, but Moses is so intent on saving the lives of the people that he offers his own life in place of theirs. (verse 32) Moses is saying that he would much rather die the pains of hell than see this worthless bunch of misfits perish. This disobedient nation goes by the name of the Lord, and that alone makes them worthy of salvation.

I believe that we need to have the heart of Moses. Regardless of whatever vision or calling we or our churches might have, love is infinitely greater. “Not new churches, O' Lord... but, please, heal the churches that already exist. Not new and better leaders, O' Lord, but revive the ones that already exist so that they might fulfill your will for us in Jesus Christ. O' God heal! My life is in agony over this!”

Love in Jesus Christ is what we the church need. It is through love that we become one. If we compare the portion of scripture found in John 17:20-26 with the scripture found in John 13:34-35, it becomes clear that the oneness that Jesus is referring to is the result of our mutual love for one another. As we receive Jesus' love for us, it becomes natural that we love one another. This is the work of Jesus in his church, namely, to create a body that wholly and completely edifies itself in love from head to foot. Jesus, the head, works in us, so that we might work together in one another in perfect harmony and peace. (Ephesians 4:15-16)

It goes without saying that this oneness in the church as a whole starts with our churches individually. If our individual churches are not abiding in love, then we cannot minister this love to other churches. We must learn that before we can do something big, we must do that which is small. If we can't be trusted with that which is small, why in the world would Jesus commit to us greater things? Thus, love begins in our own small churches and spreads out into the body as a whole. In other words, it is only through the perfect bond of love in our individual churches that the oneness of the body as a whole even becomes conceivable. When we believers love another, our love will naturally pour out into other churches and eventually the whole world.

This brings me to the next topic at hand, namely, that when we the church as a whole become one, we should desire our oneness to communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. This is the promise given us in John 13:34-35 and John 17:21-23 and this is God's preferred method of evangelism. Let's take one more look at the verses found in John 13 and 17 and compare them to a very familiar passage of scripture found in Matthew 28:18-20.

“34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. 35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love

one to another.” (John 13:34-35)

“21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. 22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: 23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” (John 17:21-23)

“18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

I believe that if we read the above three passages of scripture carefully, it becomes apparent what the will of Jesus Christ is for us pertaining to evangelism and missions. Matthew 28:18-20 is a passage of scripture that is commonly referred to as the Great Commission. Our commission is to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ into the world and make disciples. (Also see Luke 24:47 and Mark 16:15.) However, what exactly does this mean? I believe that a careful read of Matthew 28:18-20 holds the answer to this question. Reading the passage again, Jesus is mainly telling his apostles to teach all nations by teaching them to obey everything that Jesus had commanded them. So, what exactly are the commandments of Jesus Christ? Namely, his commandments are for us to believe in him and love one another. It is through believing in him that we are saved and it is through believing in him that everything else good follows such as holiness, prayers, good works, and evangelism. However, as we saw earlier, the

greatest work of faith in Jesus Christ is love. Through believing in Jesus' love for us, we in turn bear the fruits of love naturally and abundantly. I believe that this is the reason why the apostles' letters speak more to us about faith and love than any other topic. Read the letters again carefully starting from Paul's letters all the way to Jude's letter. There is a hundred times more emphasis on faith in Jesus that works by love than there is on us getting involved in evangelism and outreach to the unsaved. Why would this be? The answer must be that this is how the apostles understood Jesus' commandment to teach all nations. The apostles taught by showing forth the faith in Jesus that works by love. Their longing plea was for us to love one another and do good to each other in faith and truth. If we are faithful to each other, God will be faithful to us and our churches. However, if we don't become one in love and faith, how can we expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son into the world? Therefore, let's be faithful to one another as the body of Jesus Christ. If we are faithful to each other, God will be faithful to us and add to our churches as many as should be saved. (Acts 2:44-47)

To say it again, if we become one in Jesus, the world will know that the Father sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world. We have to believe this. This is a simple message. Let's just become one in love. We don't need better methods and strategies to get people into our churches. We don't need to think of ways to make the Gospel more attractive and friendly. Let's just believe that Jesus is indeed the Savior of the world and that he is faithful to his word. Let's desire to see Jesus fulfill his truth in us and in the world. Let's become one in love and we will be sure to see the goodness of God communicated to the whole world.

Finally, our desire as the church of Jesus Christ should be to be with Jesus where he is and behold his glory as the only begotten Son of God. As Jesus puts it in John 17:24, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou

lovedst me before the foundation of the world.” Jesus here is telling the Father clearly that it is his desire for us to be with him and behold his glory. Oh, how lovely this is indeed! The lover of our souls desires us! Oh, how this melts our hearts in reciprocated love for him! Oh, how this makes us declare with Paul, “[I have] a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.” (Philippians 1:23) This is the hope of the body of Jesus Christ, namely, to be with our head! Just as we can't imagine a body without a head, we likewise can't imagine the church without Jesus Christ. Our destiny from the foundation of the world has been to be with him where he is so that we can behold his glory!

This passage in John tells us much about heaven. Heaven is a place filled with the glory of Jesus Christ. Heaven is all about Jesus Christ. It wouldn't be an overstatement to say that heaven itself is Jesus Christ, for he is in it all and it is in him and he is the fullness of it. Heaven is the place where we behold the glory of Jesus face to face. Knowing this, it should only be natural for us to long for the day of his coming when we will be gathered up to be with him. Knowing this, our best thoughts and dreams in this world should be Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone, for he is our past, present, and future and our eternal existence is summed up in his name! Knowing this, “we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed up with our house which is from heaven...We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 5:2-8)

Thinking about the things to come, our desire for Jesus should grow more and more. We, the church, should be eagerly expecting and waiting for his arrival so that we unite our prayers and heart groanings as we say “Come, Lord Jesus.” (Revelation 22:20) Our oneness in this desire for Jesus' coming is essential and most important. Just as a body is not complete without its head, a body is likewise incomplete without its hands or its feet. (In other words, we are the body parts, and thus, we must be united in our desires. 1 Corinthians 12:3-27) We need to be one, waiting for our

head. When Jesus comes, the body is complete and we are united in eternal love and glory. Oh, how we should be “looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.” (2 Peter 3:12)

Jesus' coming is dreadful and fearful to the unbelieving world, but to us who are saved, it is altogether magnificent and the completeness of all things. We can have confidence in his coming for we, in child-like faith, believe the simplicity of the promise given to us: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” (John 6:47) We have nothing else to hold unto but his faithfulness. He made us a promise to save us and sealed that promise in the blood of his cross. He rose again and we, too, have had our hearts risen in eager anticipation for the day of our redemption. Because he lives, we live and we shall live. We shall live forever as a family with our God Jesus and his Father. We know that the world can't receive these things. To the world these things are foolish. Yea, even more so, these things are fearful to an unbelieving world. However, to us who are sealed by his Holy Spirit, we have the confidence to say, “Even so, Amen.” (Revelation 1:7)

The purpose of God is fulfilled in the gathering of all of the saints unto himself. Let's desire this day more than we desire anything else. Let's never make excuses regardless of how reasonable they may seem to us. Let's throw away any thoughts that would hinder his coming. Jesus Christ desires a people who are waiting for him. He desires a people who long to be with him. He desires a people who put him before anyone and anything else. He is coming for those who are waiting for him and he is coming for those who love his coming. (Hebrews 9:28 and 2 Timothy 4:8)

As the church of Jesus Christ, let's not come behind in any of these things, for this is the desire of the whole earth. This is the earnest expectation of all things created and uncreated. (Romans 8:19-25 and John 17:24) Jesus himself has declared, “Surely I come quickly.” (Revelation 22:20) For nearly, 2000 years he has been preparing our heavenly home and perfecting his body. (John

14:3 and Ephesians 5:25-27) He has been making his preparations all of this time so let's be helpers together with him. Let's fulfill his word and become one in faith and love, and thereby hasten the day of his coming.

In conclusion, I would like to just say again that our future is bright and glorious. Let's take heart and be courageous. Jesus is the Savior of the world and he is faithful to save all of those who believe on him. He sees us and he desires to be with us. He knows that many of us are weary and weak. He knows that many of us are the least of his brethren. He has not forgotten his beloved ones. His thoughts toward us are good and our humbleness will make our future glory even that much more glorious. So, let's take heart and desire him more than we desire our next breath. Let's go and stay before him as little children. Let's stay before him in complete adoration. He is our God and he is our redeemer. Let's praise God the Father for sending his Son and let's bow down before the Son in faith and innocence. He knows us and he knows that we are unable to offer him anything. It is for this reason that he says, "Come and rest. Just believe in me and you will be saved and live forever." (Matthew 11:28 and John 6:47)

It is my longing desire that this book has been a light and a comfort to the people of Jesus Christ. May God be with us all and may our eyes and hearts always be toward him. May our love for one another overflow like a glorious fountain. May we become one in him. Hallelujah! Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen.