



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 17: 20-26

Summer 2023

"The Other Sheep"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Seth. And thank you for that Scripture reading. It's a good introduction to our text this morning, which I've titled, "The Other Sheep", because the Lord has been praying for His eleven disciples and now He turns His attention to those who would come down through the ages— 'the other sheep'. We begin our text with verse 20,

²⁰ "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, (*that is, 'these' eleven disciples*), but for those also who believe in Me through their word; ²¹ that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

²² The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; ²³ I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. (*What an amazing statement that is! You could do a whole sermon on that: That He loves us just as He loves His own Son.*) ²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

²⁵ "O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; ²⁶ and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

John 17: 20-26

What a wonderful text; the Lord praying for us and the saints down through the ages. Let's pray, and ask the LORD's blessing upon us and our time here.

Father, we do that. We pray You would bless us, and may our time together in this text help us to frame our thoughts in terms of eternity, and always to live in light of the great hope that we have that Christ has secured for His people at the cross, and that we enter into through faith. And that's all, through faith, and faith alone, and then we're changed, we're different, and we live to Your glory, as Peter tells us in 1 Peter, chapter 1, and as Alan explained so well this morning in the lesson.

So LORD, we pray that You would bless us in this hour, and help us to see these things, and the great relationship that Christ has obtained for us with the Triune God, and Your love for us that brought that about. So LORD, we commit our time to You, and we pray for ourselves spiritually.

But we also think physically, LORD, of our needs, and pray that You would bless us. If we enjoy health, if we're able to be here, and we're not experiencing pain, that's a gift from You—and we should always understand that. But there are trials in life. There are sicknesses and difficulties of various kinds, and we pray for those of us who are going through difficulties—physical difficulties that You would bless and You would pour out Your grace upon us.

Father, we thank You for all the good things we have. It's all from You, and even the trials that we go through. There are difficulties, but they have a purpose. Maybe we don't see them, but they have a purpose; everything comes from You. And the Lord

describes You as “righteous Father” here—and everything You do with us, and how You deal with us is done righteously. So may be grateful for that.

And we look to You, LORD, now to bless us, give us understanding, teach us, build us up in the faith we pray. And we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) We come now to the final portion of John 17, known as ‘the Lord’s high priestly prayer.’ Jesus has prayed for Himself, for His eleven disciples, and now prays for the church. Earlier, in chapter 10, (vs16), as I mentioned at the outset as we were reading the Scripture, the Lord said that He had “other sheep” who were not of the fold of Israel, and He “must bring them also”. He prays for them in these last verses, (and for you and me). He made three requests. He prayed first for the unity of the church, then He prayed for the witness of the church, and finally He prayed for the eternal blessing of the church—that it would see His glory. But His first concern, His immediate concern, was for our unity and "that they may all be one...", He said. (vs21a).

Unity is not just important, it is essential. When the signers of the Declaration of Independence put their names on the document, they had made themselves traitors to the crown and invited the wrath of King George. Benjamin Franklin understood the seriousness of their act and he warned them, "We must all hang together, or we will surely hang separately." In every collective effort, from sports to politics to the ‘Great Commission’, (the work of the church), unity is vital for victory.

But it is hard to maintain. Human nature fights against it. The revolutionaries of France discovered that about 20 years after our Declaration was signed. Their motto was, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity", (brotherhood). That fraternity broke down and the revolutionaries became the victims of their own revolution.

But the church is something different. We are a true brotherhood, a family, a body. We are the Lord’s flock. He is our shepherd; He shepherds us; He keeps us one. And He is able to do that very thing, to be united—which is amazing, really miraculous when you think about it, and you consider what the church is, what it's made of. It's

people from all ethnicities and walks of life; men and women, people of different cultures and languages—but one in Christ, and for all eternity. However, maintaining that oneness in the meantime, (in the present), though is the challenge. And so unity is one of the Lord's main concerns in His great prayer for us.

He's already prayed for His disciples, that the Father would keep them united in the truth; "Keep them in Your name" (11b), He prayed. Now the circle widens to include all believers, those the apostles would reach with the Gospel in the first century, and those down through the centuries into the 21st century with the Gospel—the church; "that they may all be one." (vs21a).

The model for our unity is that of the Father and Son. "...even," He said, "as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You..." (vs21b). He repeats that in verse 22, "that they may be one, just as We are one."

Now fundamentally, they are One in essence. The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are the Trinity, the One God who subsists, or exists, in three Persons. Each Person is distinguishable, yet they are One. John indicated that from the very first verse of this Gospel, when he wrote that, "...the Word was with God...", (a distinct Person from the Father), "...and the Word was God." —One with Him in divine essence. Distinct, and yet One; One in divine essence. And because God is a unity, the Father and the Son are of the same mind—the same will and purpose. They are united in love, and holiness, and truth—and united in their function.

And this is the Lord's prayer for the church: That we, who are distinguishable from one another, all kinds of people with different gifts, and different callings, different backgrounds, that we would be *one* in our love; united in purpose and united in function. And that is possible because we are united together in Christ. Through our mutual indwelling of the Holy Spirit, Christ lives within each of us and He binds us together. Our unity is a spiritual unity.

But also it's one that should be observed—it should be seen by those around us. That's clear from the purpose given for this unity, (in verses 21 and 23), so that 'the

world may believe that You've sent Me.' That's the Lord's second request: That the church would have an effective witness in the world—and that the church will have that in a way that people will see it and be influenced by it; and that it will have that, (and only have that), through its unity in both *truth* and *love*—in both *belief* and *action*. That's the kind of unity He's speaking of here. It's what He prayed for in verse 23, "...that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved me."

Again, we are united like 'branches in the vine', which the Lord taught on, and spoke of, back in chapter 15. Through faith, all of God's people are joined together equally in Christ. That unity can never be disrupted. That unity is permanent. But that unity among ourselves is to be protected by us, and it's to be developed by us. A vine matures and grows and produces fruit when it is protected and cultivated. And the church grows together as it is cultivated in truth. It matures; and is increasingly united in truth and functions faithfully.

Then the world will see the reality of the new life in us, and the reality of the truth that we proclaim: That Christ came from the Father; He is God's Son and the Savior, sent by the Father because He loves us. We will make that known when we adopt the Lord's way and follow the path that He took of lowly service. He was the great servant—and that's what we're to be.

In fact, that's what Paul wrote to the Philippians: He counseled them on how to remain united. He counseled them to be like Christ, who emptied Himself by becoming a bond-servant. Paul was urging the Philippians to have the unity of mind and purpose that the Lord was praying for right here. Well that takes humility, doing "nothing from selfishness or empty conceit", as Paul wrote. (Phl 2:3).

It's difficult to be disunited when we are being unselfish, when we are deferring to others, seeking their best out of love for them and for the glory of Christ—and the Gospel, the furtherance of the Gospel. We do that by being humble.

Well, that's the right witness to the world. Jesus said that back in chapter 13, in verse 35, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Now, just that won't cause the world to believe. I don't want to suggest that if we just love one another more the world will be drawn to us and believe—and that that's all that's necessary; not at all. But it is a witness to the world of the reality of our salvation. It is an evidence of a great work that's taken place within us, and of the genuineness of it.

But it is the *truth*, the Gospel, the message that we preach, though, that we are to be united in. That is what brings about salvation as people hear it and believe it. And that, again, is what we are united in: Our love for one another is based on the truth that Christ is God's eternal Son, whom He sent, and who died for sinners; and that there is salvation in no one else, and then we invite people to come to Him and believe in Him. That's the unity Christ prayed for here. Love and unity can never be at the expense of truth, at the expense of the Gospel and the essential doctrines of the faith.

Now, the world doesn't like that. The world is ecumenical. It likes John Lennon's idea of, 'Imagining a world with no heaven, no hell, no countries to die for, no religion too,...just all people living in peace. If you can imagine that', he said, 'then the world will live as one.' Or 'No dogma that divides, no doctrine to fight over, no truth, just empty heads living in peace.' Now that's the world.

But remember, the Lord isn't here praying for the world; He said He wasn't in verse 9. He was praying for those, 'the Father had *given* to Him'. He was praying for *His* people, for the *elect*. It's how He prayed in verse 20, "...for those...who believe in Me through their word:...", (for the church), "...that they may all be one;"

But for us to have peace and unity, to "be one", we must have doctrine. And at the center of our doctrine is the *truth* that the Triune God loves the world, in all of its parts—and He gave His Son to die for it.

Teaching the lost that message is how the Great Commission, (which is the great mission of the church), will be fulfilled because it declares the great unimaginable truth that God Almighty, the Father, loves us. He loves us even as He loves His Son. In fact, so much does He love us, "that He gave His only begotten Son" as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins, so that we would be His children in His family—John 3:16.

Now it is a great and glorious truth that, 'The Father loves sinners; that He loves the undeserving'...But that, '*The Father loves us, even as He loves His own Son*', (and *Jesus loves us equally*)—that is a startling revelation! I can maybe understand that He loves me as much as He loves an angel—but not as much as He loves His eternal Son. But that is what He said here in verse 23...and what we are to make known! Don Carson commented, "It is hard to imagine a more compelling evangelistic appeal".

And I think that's correct. Those who come to Him, (to the Father), who believe in Him, are His people, His chosen people whom He loves equally and infinitely. He doesn't have favorites; He can't love us infinitely and have any distinction between us. He loves us infinitely, even as He loves Christ. Well, that being the case, what then won't He do for us that is for our good?

An amazing truth and a great assurance and comfort to the believer—and one that aids us in our unity because knowing how much the Lord loves our fellow believers, with whom we may be in conflict, should stimulate our love for them in unity. He loves them, as He loves us.

Well, that's a witness to the world. It demonstrates, as I said, the reality of the truth within us and of God's love for us even though we are all individuals and very, very different from one another. We have different backgrounds, different issues, different ... well, you can name innumerable differences that we have—and yet all of us are brought together in unity, united in love for one another.

One example of that from the Scriptures is in the early church, and the love that Gentiles believers had for the Jewish people, the Jewish saints in Jerusalem, who had survived a famine and suffered great persecution. They were destitute, and I think many

of these Gentile believers had an affection for them, for they knew they had something of a debt to the Jewish people because the Lord is a Jew. He came into this world through the nation Israel. He's Jewish—Jewish forever, in His human nature. And so they had a sense of a desire to help.

So Paul took up a gift for the Jerusalem church from the churches of Galatia and then from the churches of Macedonia and Greece. The Corinthians were very wealthy. Paul wrote on more than one occasion to them about this gift; for they had much wealth and they could give easily.

But the Macedonians, the churches like the church of Philippi and the church in Thessalonica, they were not so rich; in fact, they were dirt poor, so poor that Paul tried to dissuade them from giving. But they begged him to let them contribute because they saw a need, and they wanted to help the saints. So they gave. And Paul said, 'they gave beyond their ability', to support the saints, saints that they'd never met.

Today, ministries beg churches for money. But then, churches begged the apostles to take their money out of love for the saints. Now that's the fruit of God's love for them; it causes love and unity. Now that is supernatural; that is God's love in us. It's a work of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, and then six other virtues that he mentions. But love is a gift. It's the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of His people.

But it is always done in connection with truth, with the knowledge of God in His grace. Truth, doctrine, the glory which the Lord, in verse 22, said He gave to us, which is the knowledge of His self-sacrifice for us, the knowledge of His grace to us, the Gospel—that knowledge, that truth, that glory moves us to act in unity and love. So the church has two responsibilities given here. The first is to proclaim the message of Christ. The second is to publicly show our genuine unity in Christ. The life changing reality of the Gospel.

But as we all know, even among believers, unity sometimes breaks down. Regrettably, it may be over personal matters as it seems to have been in Philippi when

Euodia and Syntyche feuded with one another. They were friends and colleagues in the ministry who had served with Paul—but something had happened. Paul doesn't elaborate what it was. It seems to have been some personal friction between them; and so he urged them, personally, to live in harmony, (that's what the Lord prayed for). Put these things aside and live in harmony in the Lord. And then Paul asked the church “to help” them, (and that's what we need to do when we see such a thing). Unity is vitally important, so Paul urged it there. (Phl 4:2-3).

Other separations of colleagues occur over principle—as it did with Paul and Barnabas when Paul refused to allow Mark to join the second missionary journey due to his failure in the first one, (you may remember that as they went into Asia Minor, he must have seen the mountains they had to climb, and the places they had to go, and it disturbed him; and he abandoned the mission and went back to Jerusalem).

And so, as they planned this second missionary journey Paul said, ‘No, he's not ready to go.’ And he would not let Mark join them on that mission. And so Barnabas and Paul separated over that; Barnabas taking Mark with him back to Cyprus where he gave his young nephew attention.

And the result of that was that Mark later became very “useful” to Paul in the ministry. That's what he wrote in 2 Timothy chapter 4, verse 11, when he invited him to Rome to help him minister in the last days of his life. Obviously, they'd already done a lot of ministering together. Sometimes those are principles that take place, and there's separation over that. And sometimes divisions, separations are inevitable on the basis of principle—not sin, but differences in perspective and conviction. That was Paul and Barnabas.

But other times, oftentimes, it's due to compromise or denial of the truth. One example of that from church history occurred between John Wesley and George Whitefield, who had been best friends at Oxford. After Wesley was converted he joined Whitefield in the early days of the first Great Awakening that had begun with Whitefield's electrifying preaching.

But they had theological differences. Whitefield was a Calvinist, Wesley was an Armenian—who denounced the doctrine of predestination in a sermon, calling it “a doctrine full of blasphemy.” And there were other doctrinal differences, like Wesley's belief in *perfectionism*. All of that led to Whitefield and the Wesleys, (John Wesley and Charles, his brother), separating in the ministry.

It wasn't personal, it was doctrinal. Afterward Whitefield called the Wesleys, "Dear and old friends whom I still love as my own soul." And I think that is the important lesson in all of this. Differences this side of heaven are inevitable among thinking Christians with conviction. Sometimes those differences, doctrinal differences, prohibit people from ministering together. But they should separate with respect and hospitality as Christian brothers and friends.

That's possible, and that's necessary, and can be a good witness to the world—which is the great concern here in the Lord's prayer for the church and its unity. But for our part, it's our responsibility to follow the Lord's will and seek unity. Paul said, in Romans 14, verse 19, "...pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another."

To do that and promote unity, Dr. Johnson suggested thinking of a circle, and remembering that two points on its circumference become nearer to one another the nearer they come to the center of that circle. And he said, "If we think of Christ as the center of the circle, then the nearer any two members of the family come to Him, the nearer they come to one another." And that's unity, and that's true.

We can only do that, though, by studying the Word of God, which reveals the LORD to us. And so the more we know it, the more we know Scripture, the more we will know Him who is revealed in the Scriptures, and the closer we will draw to Him and be like Him.

Now, here's the good news: God can never separate. The Trinity, the three in One are united forever—distinct Persons of one essence, equal in power and glory and

authority—and with one unfrustratable will. So the Trinity can never divide or disagree—and never forsake His perfect plan to save His people forever. That perfect will and purpose is revealed here in the Lord's final prayer for the church: And our essential unity in Christ, joined to Him in a living, vital relationship—branches in a vine—can never be destroyed. Our future eternity is certain and our mission in the world will succeed. That's His will—Christ prayed for it. God's eternal plan, His predestined plan, cannot fail.

And that plan for our future, and the assurance that He will never fail to save us, ultimately and forever, is seen in verse 24 where He prays that, 'we would be with Him for all eternity, and behold His glory.' This is where He finishes out His prayer specifically for the church—for us: "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."

Every elect person, everyone who has been given to Christ from all eternity, everyone who has believed in Him, will be brought to glory. That's His prayer. And His prayer, as the Son of God, cannot fail. It must be answered because the desire of the Son is the will of the Son—and so it is the will of the Father—they are One. And here the Lord prays that we behold His glory.

Early in chapter 1, John wrote that he and the others had seen Christ's glory, "full of grace and truth". (vs14). They had witnessed it in the miracles, or signs, that He had done—and supremely they had witnessed God's glory in the cross and resurrection. But they had not seen His glory "in its unveiled splendor", as Don Carson put it.

If you have admired a beautiful sunset, or a majestic landscape then you have had, perhaps, a hint of what awaits us when this prayer is fulfilled and we see Him—we get that beatific vision of the triumphant, glorified God-man. That's going to be a great day; a glorious thing to see—the glory of our Lord. You can't really explain it, but we just know that is a glorious, glorious thing.

Still, we have that opportunity now in that we see His glory when we see it in the Word of God. As we read it, we see it. As we study the Scriptures and consider who He is

and what He has done as He shows His power over nature in the Gospels and His kindness toward broken sinners—we see His glory.

And as we see it, it affects us; it changes us. I say that on the authority of the apostle Paul, who wrote in 2 Corinthians 3:18, that as we behold in Scripture, “the glory of the Lord”, we, “are being transformed into the same image, from glory to glory.” That's now; that's the blessing that's given to us as we read Scripture—and we should spend our lives reading the Scriptures.

That being so, what will happen when we see Him personally in His unveiled splendor? That will be amazing. There will be a complete glorious transformation of our soul when we will be perfect; and then, in the resurrection, our bodies will be glorified, along with our souls. Now that's our hope—that's what awaits us either at the moment of death or if we are among those blessed saints alive at the Lord's return who are 'caught up to meet Him in the air' as Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

But that's what the Lord prayed for: That we be with Him, and see His glory, and share His glory. That's, by the way, the implication of the Lord's prayer here, that we will *share* His glory. Not just see it, but as we see it we're transformed and we become like Him.

No wonder Paul, for example, told the Philippians that he was, “hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ”, (Phl 1:23), or to remain in this world, in this life, in this body, (that in his case was wracked with pain from all that he'd gone through), to remain with them and minister to them. He chose, in that text in Philippians, to remain with them even though he desired to be with the Lord. But out of selfless love for them, he would stay here, for he hoped to be able to contribute to their spiritual lives. But he knew the greatness of what lay ahead in glory, as so many of the saints who faced death did.

I've seen that with a number of people that I've done funerals for—and sat with some. —Actually, it's been women who've been wracked with pain from cancer or knowing that the end is coming, but they have faced it with *joy*. I've been impressed by

that; they didn't fear death—they longed to be with the Lord. I've heard them confess that; "I want to see Christ. I want to see Jesus." And so, that was Paul, that he was willing to stay here and be with those Philippians to help them.

But what a glorious thing awaits us; and what an encouragement to know that the last thing that Christ prayed here for the church, for us, is that we, 'be with Him'. (vs24b). God wants us with Him for all eternity, individually, personally. I've said this before, and I think it's true, (don't ask me for a verse), but this is a theological conclusion I've reached: He's the God-man. He had a finite human nature, body, soul, and spirit, joined to the infinite, divine nature as the Logos that He had been for all eternity. And in His divine nature, as He hung on the cross, and as He faced the cross at this point in His prayer, He's thinking of you personally, individually; and wants you with Him. That's an amazing thing. That's something to reflect upon. That's how much He loves His people. He wants you to be with Him to behold His glory and share in His glory. He doesn't need us. The Triune God was perfectly happy—infinately, gloriously happy, (and needs nothing), for all eternity—but now *wants* us. And that is His desire from His infinite goodness and unconditional love. That's heaven.

We wonder what it's like. Well, it's being with Christ, in His presence; and beholding His glory, and sharing in His glory. I think that is really too big a thought to get our brains around. Robert Murray McCheyne wrote, "It's only when we're there with Christ on high that we will understand; then, Lord, shall I fully know, not till then how much I owe." (*How Much I Owe*, hymn by McCheyne).

In the meantime, though, it's well worth trying to know, because as we consider it, we become increasingly thankful; and as we become increasingly thankful, we become increasingly active and seeking unity. It's 'a purifying hope', the Lord's return and seeing Him, says 1 John 3:3.

The Lord concluded His prayer in verse 25 and 26 with a survey of His ministry, past and future. First He addressed the Father as "righteous Father", which speaks of the

character of the Father. It's His nature to be righteous; it's what He is. He will speak of the world—and God deals with the world righteously. He will conclude by speaking of His people—and God deals with us righteously. All that happens to us; everything that occurs in our life, the trials of life, the Father knows it all. He hears our prayers, just as He heard the prayers of His Son—and He does not neglect us. The answers may not come as soon as we want, but He never neglects us. He's perfect and wise in His response to us.

Nothing comes into our lives unrighteously. He watches over us and treats us as the Lord speaks of Him here as the "righteous Father." And we must believe that in hard times, in difficult times. Remember, as Paul told the Corinthians, "We walk by faith, not by sight." (2Cor 5:7).

Then the Lord recalled His past ministry in verse 25. His ministry was a success. You might not think so, looking at the world's response: The Lord said, "The world has not known You." But His disciples did. They knew that the Father had sent Him, and He said that He had made known God's name to them; He had revealed to them the nature of the Father and He would continue to do that: "I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known..." (vs26).

He will do that at the cross where God's glory would be seen—glory in that there's the great love that God has for His people, that He would sacrifice His own Son. There's the justice and the holiness of God that condemned and judged His own Son who bore our sin; and they would see that glory and that love. So they had more to learn—and we have much to learn as we simply reflect upon the cross, as we'll do in this room in a few moments.

But He would also teach them through the Spirit, as He has promised them throughout this great upper room discourse, the "Helper" who He would send to them, who would guide them into all truth, give them knowledge. How important that is. The knowledge of God, rightly absorbed by us, comprehended and believed, transforms us the more that God is made known to us. And specifically in this area does it transform us

in regard to the context of His prayer in loving one another, and being united with one another.

That's why unity among so many different kinds of people is really possible. The Lord, through the Holy Spirit, is living and active within us to make it so. Supernatural; but it occurs. And again, what a testimony that is to the world. And He's speaking in terms of being united, joined to one another, and united in the truth, in the Gospel, to be a witness to the world. What a testimony that is to a world that is so divided against itself, (driven by selfishness and hate), to see love and unity in the church. A great witness; an important witness. So may the life of Christ and His love increase in us. It's a witness to the reality of salvation, of new life, and a glorious future.

If you desire that salvation—freedom from the guilt of sin and the power of sin and the judgment upon sin, if you desire the power of Christ that is spoken of here, then look to Christ. Trust in Him. On the cross, He took the punishment of all who believe in Him. He went through our doom and darkness in our place. He has prayed that we be with Him forever, beholding His glory, and experiencing it.

Ask yourself, where will you spend eternity? If you want to be with the Savior, if you want to be in glory, if you want to have joy in expressible, then come to Him, believe in Him. He receives all who do. And then live in unity and love with one another. May God help us to do that.

(Closing prayer) We thank You, Father, for redeeming us and giving us a secure life in this difficult world, and a glorious, eternal future. We thank You for that, and thank You for all that we have in Christ.

And now the LORD bless you and keep and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

(End of Audio)