

### **Acts 1.6-14**

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

### **Psalm 68**

Let God rise up, let his enemies be scattered;  
let those who hate him flee before him.  
As smoke is driven away, so drive them  
away;

as wax melts before the fire,  
let the wicked perish before God.  
But let the righteous be joyful;  
let them exult before God;  
let them be jubilant with joy.

Sing to God, sing praises to his name;  
lift up a song to him who rides upon the  
clouds—

his name is the LORD—  
be exultant before him.

### **1 Peter 4.12-14**

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

### **John 17.1-11**

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

“I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

The apostle Paul describes his own frustration with unanswered prayer in his second letter to the church at Corinth, as he tells of a “thorn in the flesh” he had been given to teach him humility: “Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me,” Paul writes (2 Cor 12:8). When he finally got an answer, it wasn’t the one he’d been hoping to hear. Paul continues, “but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for [my] power is made perfect in [your] weakness” (2 Cor 12:9).

The setting of this prayer is the upper room, on the night before Christ’s arrest and crucifixion. Jesus has been pouring out his heart to his friends, encouraging them to carry on his work after he is gone. “Let not your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me,” he tells them (John 14:1). “Abide in me, as I abide in you.” (John 15:4). He warns them that they will suffer after he is gone, but he also gives them a promise: “In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have overcome the world!” (John 16:33). And then, with his friends gathered around him, he prays for them. It’s pretty clear that Jesus chooses his words for their benefit – after all, he knew that God the Father didn’t need to have eternal life explained. But the disciples did.

And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Jesus does not describe “eternal life” in terms of time, but in terms of relationship. Eternal life is to know God, and to know Christ. And in knowing Christ, we experience his glory. In knowing Christ, we belong to God. Jesus goes on to affirm that we who believe in him belong to God, as he asks for God’s glory to shine through his followers.

“I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.”

Then Jesus goes on to ask protection for his disciples who will remain in the world after he returns to his place at the right hand of the Father:

And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

Notice that Jesus has already stated that those who believe in him are one with him and with the Father. Here, he is asking for something else. He is asking God to protect those who believe so that they may be one with each other, as Father and Son are one.

He was not asking for unanimity, but unity. Australian theologian Andrew Prior writes, “Unity is not about agreement. Too often agreement is about the patron calling the shots. Was not the Nicene Creed hastened to a “unity” because of Constantine’s political needs and some not too subtle threats? Unity where agreement is paramount will forever be at risk of scapegoating. Just get rid of the difficult ones, the odd ones out, and we will have agreement.

“Unity is about loving each other as Christ has loved us. (John 13:34-35) The love of Christ does not kill the ones who disagree; it dies for the ones who disagree!”