**“THE POWER OF UNITY: WHAT THE CHURCH**

**IN THE EPICENTER MUST LEARN**

**FROM JESUS’ HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER”**

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**Introduction**

Good morning.

What a blessing this Summit has been already to Lynn and me and to our team.

Last night, Anne walked us through “The Daniel Prayer.”

This morning, Ronnie taught us “The Apostles’ Prayer” in Acts chapter four.

Now we come to “The High Priestly Prayer of Jesus” – one of the most remarkable prayers ever recorded in the Scriptures, and one that holds lessons I believe are vital for the Church in this critical hour.

Would you turn in your Bibles to John 17?

**The True Lord’s Prayer**

As you do, let me set the context.

The Messiah has just celebrated Passover with the Twelve. What an intimate gathering around a special meal with dear, dear friends -- and what a privilege that we are invited into the room where it happened.

Now, we typically think of the prayer recorded in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4 as The Lord’s Prayer -- *“Our Father, who art in heaven….”*

That certainly was a beautiful and powerful prayer – yet when we think about it carefully, it isn’t really “The Lord’s Prayer.” It isn’t how Jesus prayed to the Father. Jesus didn’t need to ask His Father to forgive Him for His sins, right? For the Scriptures make it clear He was without sin.

Rather, this was really Jesus’ instruction to His disciples on how humbled sinners ought to pray to the Father. It was a divine template – an outline of topics – for how we ought to pray, and that’s why it’s so important.

Perhaps it would be more accurate to call it, “The Disciple’s Prayer.”

The true “Lord’s Prayer,” as Pastor and Bible teacher John MacArthur has noted, is found in here in John 17 – for here the curtain is pulled back and we get to see how the Son actually spoke to His Father.

When you think about it, very rarely in the Gospels do we get to see Jesus’ prayers up close and personal. The Gospels certainly inform us that Jesus prayed often. We know that the Son got up early in the morning to spend time alone with His Father. We know that they spoke throughout the day. And while we occasionally get glimpses of these prayers – a few lines here and there – the Scriptures do not record most of these prayers in any detail.

Yet here in John 17 we see the longest prayer of Jesus ever recorded, and there is so much for us to learn.

**Three Sections**

The prayer is actually divided into three sections.

* In verses 1 through 5, Jesus prays for Himself.
* In verses 6 through 19, Jesus prays for His friends.
* In the last section – verses 20 through 26 – Jesus prays for us.

I will spend the most time on this last section because that’s where the Spirit has been focusing me in recent months. But let’s start at the beginning.

**SECTION ONE: John 17:1-5 – The Hour Has Come**

*Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You,* ***2****even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life.* ***3****This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and [Yeshua HaMashiach] Jesus Christ whom You have sent.* ***4****I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do.* ***5****Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.*

The Passover Seder is over. Jesus has sent Judas Iscariot away to be indwelt by Satan. Christ has already celebrated communion with the Eleven. He has shared with them matters dear to His heart.

Now, Jesus lifts His eyes to heaven and says, “Father, the hour has come.”

What hour?

* In John 2:4, Jesus had said, “My hour has not yet come.”
* In John 7:6, Jesus said, “My time is not yet here….”
* In John 8:20, the Apostle John writes, “These words [Jesus] spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come.”

Yet now the time has come for the Son of Man to become the Suffering Servant foretold in Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22.

After some thirty-three years on earth – and three years of public ministry – the time has arrived for the Messiah to pay the penalty for every sin we have ever committed, and then to rise from the dead, according to the Scriptures.

At this point, Jesus has “accomplished the work” the Father had given Him to do. He has…..

* Loved the lost.
* Taught the Word.
* Healed the sick.
* Raised the dead.
* Preached the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles.
* Made disciples.
* Resisted all sin.
* And fulfilled Messianic prophecy.

Having kept His part of the bargain, Jesus now asks the Father will keep His:

* To bring home His beloved Son
* To restore Him to His rightful glory which He set aside when He came to earth as a baby born in a manger in the little town of Bethlehem.
* The Bible makes clear the Father heard these prayers and answered them.

**SECTION TWO: John 17:6-19 – The Men Whom You Gave Me**

***6****“I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.* ***7****Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You;* ***8****for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me.* ***9****I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours;* ***10****and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them.* ***11****I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are.* ***12****While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.* ***13****But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.* ***14****I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.* ***15****I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.* ***16****They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.* ***17****Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.* ***18****As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.* ***19****For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.*

What is so beautiful about this passage is the affection Jesus has for His friends.

Here in Section Two, Jesus prays for the eleven men who had lived with Him, traveled with Him, ate and sung and laughed with Him, men whom He had taught and corrected and encouraged and given assignments.

And He proves to be not just their Good Teacher but their Good Shepherd.

* He has made the Name and nature of God known to them.
* Now He asks the Father to protect them, to guard them spiritually and physically.
* All of them, that is, except the “son of perdition” – Judas Iscariot – who would betray Him and be condemned to Hell and eternal damnation.
* What’s more, Christ asks the Father to give the Eleven His deep, deep joy as they walk with Him and fulfill the mission He gave them -- to preach the Gospel and make disciples of all nations.
* And once again, the Father not only hears these prayers but answers them in full.

**SECTION THREE:**

**John 17:20-26 – For Those Who Believe In Me Through Their Word**

***20****“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, 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.* ***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.”*

Here in Section Three, Jesus turns His attention to us – to you and me and His Church, His beloved bride.

*“I do not ask on behalf of these [apostles] alone,”* Jesus says in verse 20*, “but for those also who believe in Me through their word….”*

And what is it that our Savior wants for us?

It’s quite a list, actually….

* He wants us to truly believe and understand that the Father sent Him, and that He is the very Messiah foretold by Moses and the prophets. (17:21,22,23,25)
* He wants us to know the name and the very nature of God.
* He wants us to be in Him, and Him to be in us. (17:22)
* He wants us to see and experience the glory of the Father. (17:22)
* He wants us to truly know and experience the love of God. (17:23, 26)
* And He wants us to be one with Him, and one with each other. (17:21,22,23)

Can you fathom from this prayer just how deeply Christ loves us and how much He wants the Father to bless us with every spiritual blessing?

Can you have any doubt the Father will answer these prayers in full?

**The Prayer For Unity**

Wow!

The riches of this prayer can and should be mined forever. There is so much here for us to meditate upon and take courage from.

Yet there is one theme the Spirit keeps underscoring to me again and again: Unity.

Of the many vital matters upon our Savior’s heart in His final prayer on His final night with the men He loved most in the world, one of the most important was the unity of the Church.

1. **17:11** – “Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, **that they may be one even as We are**.”
2. **17:20-21** – “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; **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**.”
3. **17:22** – “The glory which You have given Me I have given them, **that they may be one**, just as We are one….”
4. **17:23** – “….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.”

**The Purpose of Unity**

Why?

Of all the things He could have prayed for, why focus on unity? And why did He keep coming back to the theme again and again?

Indeed, for nearly 20% of His prayer – 5 of 26 verses – Christ is asking for the unity of the Church. Why not ask once and move on?

It certainly wasn’t because He thought the Father didn’t hear Him the first time. After all, we read in Psalm 139:4, *“Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all.”*

What then?

Upon reflection, two answers emerge.

**First, the unity of the Church is such big deal to Jesus that He couldn’t simply mention it; He wanted to talk about it with His Father at length**. The Spirit within Him so longed to see love and unity define the Church that Jesus literally couldn’t help but share this heart cry with the Father. It was a passion welling up from deep within His soul and it had to be expressed.

**Second, the unity of the Church is such a big deal to Jesus that He absolutely had to share it with the Church**. Unlike most of His prayers which were private and went unrecorded, Jesus knew full well that this prayer would be recounted in Scripture in its entirety. He knew it would be studied by believers for the next two millennia. Indeed, He wanted it to be. And by repeating the theme multiple times from multiple angles, He knew it would draw the attention of believers – maturing believers, at least – and impress upon them its immense importance.

Still, we need to press deeper.

Clearly the topic was important to Christ. But why exactly does He long for His followers not just to walk in unity but to be “perfected in unity”?

The good news is that we don’t have to guess at the answer. Jesus tells us exactly why, by using three key phrases:

* “That the world may know.”
* “That the world may believe.”
* “That they may have My joy made full.”

There is no question that God is pleased with believers who are loving and kind and walking in humility and harmony with one another. Likewise, He is displeased with those who are consumed by disunity, dissension, and open conflict.

But the text indicates that there is much more to it than this.

**First, Jesus is telling us that the love and unity of the Body that is profoundly evangelistic.**

* In verse 21, the Lord tells the Father He wants believers to be unified so “that the world may believe….that You sent Me….”
* In verse 23, He tells the Father He wants believers to be unified so “that they world may know….that You sent Me, and [that You] loved them [the disciples], even as You have loved Me.”

Here, Jesus is building on the point He made earlier that evening.

Consider John 13:34-35. *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

When followers of Jesus Christ truly love each other, respect each other and work together in humility and the common cause of the Gospel – when we are **not** fighting, bickering, arguing and in open conflict with one another – then a lost world has a chance to see the Jesus truly is both Messiah and the Prince of Peace.

That is, when we mere mortals are loving and kind and respectful of one another within the Church – even when we disagree – the world can see that Jesus Christ has the power to radically transform the souls of sinners, indeed, that He is the only One who can.

In a lost, broken and divided world, John 13 love and John 17 unity is a tremendously winsome testimony, an incredibly effective tool in the hands of the Holy Spirit to advance the Gospel.

Conversely, when believers are not loving towards one another -- when we bitter and divisive, quarreling and self-consumed -- our capacity to convince a lost world that we know and are indwelt by the Prince of Peace is severely hindered.

So that’s one of the purposes of unity: it is profoundly evangelistic.

**But there’s a second purpose, too: Jesus wants us to experience deep, deep joy.**

The Bible is clear: when we abide in Christ, when we truly walk with Him and live to please Him in the power of Holy Spirit, then we will bear much fruit. *Love, joy, peace….*

When we love God and love others we will experience Christ’s joy – the joy we were made for – joy divine and beyond description.

Yet when we are carnal – unkind, snarky, ungracious, divisive – we not only displease the Father but we rob ourselves of the very joy Christ longs to give us.

* **John 15:11** – *“These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.”*
* **John 16:24** – *“Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.”*
* **John 17:13** – *“But now I come to You, Father; and these things I speak in the world so that they [My disciples] may have My joy made full in themselves.”*

**The Power of Unity**

Brothers and sisters, there is something so beautiful, so powerful about Biblical unity.

Remember the words of the Psalmist – “**Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity**. It is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard, coming down upon the edge of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon coming down upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing – life forever.” (Psalm 133:1-3)

Such unity is….

* Good
* Pleasant
* Precious
* And brings the blessing of full and abundant life

Remember, too, the words of the Apostle Paul.

*“Therefore, I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,* ***being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace****. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.”* (Ephesians 4:1-6)

Indeed, Paul goes on to write: *“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;* ***until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man****, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”* (Ephesians 4:11-13)

On the one hand, God has already granted us unity in Christ – positionally, we are one in Christ. Our job, then, is not to create unity but to “preserve the unity of the Spirit.”

On the other hand, in our day to day reality, we still need become unified. That’s what the leaders of the Church and the gifts of the Spirit are for, to help us grow and mature in Christ until we “attain the unity of the faith.”

This is a theme Paul returns to time and again because it is so close to Christ’s heart.

* In Ephesians chapter two, Paul famously teaches us that Christ Himself “is our peace, who made both groups [Jews and Gentiles] into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity” so that in Himself “He might make the two into **one new man**, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in **one body** to God through the cross.” (Ephesians 2:14-16)
* In Colossians chapter three, Paul teaches us to “put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him – a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.” **How do we do this?** Paul tells us to “put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things **put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.**” (Colossians 3:10-14)

**Thoughts for the Church in the Epicenter**

How are you doing where you live? Are you experiencing the perfect bond of unity with believers back home?

How are we doing here in the Epicenter?

Ours, I must admit, is a mixed picture.

As the Founder and Chairman of The Joshua Fund, I have the great joy of spending time with Jewish and Arab pastors and ministry leaders here in the Land.

I’ve also had the joy of traveling to Egypt and Jordan and Iraq to spend time with dozens of Arab Evangelical pastors and ministry leaders and listen to their hearts and pray together with them.

Our Joshua Fund staff – gifted pastors, specially trained for this very work – spend even more time with such leaders. And every year, we also host conferences and retreats for hundreds of pastors and ministry leaders and their wives throughout the Epicenter. We get to sit and listen to them and pray with them and drink a lot of coffee and eat a lot of baklava with them. And we see signs of hope – we really do.

God is making the unity of His Church in the Epicenter a major priority. He is healing old wounds. He is building new bridges of friendship, dialogue and prayer.

But I believe it is fair to say that we as believers in this region have a good deal of work to do before our Lord could say we are “perfected in unity.”

So, in our final moments in this session, I’d like to address three specific questions, even as I ask you to be praying for unity among the believers in the Epicenter like you’ve never prayed before.

**Question #1: What does the Lord mean that we will one with Him?**

This refers first and foremost to our salvation.

When we are born again, the Spirit of God begins to reside in us. We are no longer outside the family of God. We are now inside the family of God.

* I Corinthians 6:17 – *“But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.”*

And yet it’s more than salvation -- the Lord wants us to change us from selfish, sinful people into loving, kind, gentle people through the power of His Holy Spirit, right?

* II Corinthians 3:17-18 – *“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. [And] we…are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.”*

The Lord longs for Israelis and Palestinians and men and women throughout the Epicenter to be born again – to become one with Him – and to become more and more like Him day by day.

So, let us be praying with greater urgency for exactly this.

**Question #2: What exactly does the Lord mean that He wants us to be one with our fellow believers?**

The word “unity” brings up different thoughts and emotions in different people.

* Are we supposed to be holding hands and singing together?
* Is this some “pie in the sky” idealism or naivete?
* Does God expect us to agree on every single matter and every single issue – theologically, politically, and inter-personally?
* Are we never supposed to have disagreements as believers?
* Are we supposed to avoid developing strong convictions that could differ with – and thus divide us from – other believers?

There are really two answers.

The near-term answer is “no” – The Lord does not expect believers to agree on every single matter and every single issue. He knows full well we are going to have disagreements on many matters, small and large, just as the early believers did.

* In Acts 11, we read that the leaders of the early church took sharp issue with the Apostle Peter because he had met with Gentiles and preached the Gospel to them.
* In Acts 15, we read that “there occurred such a sharp disagreement [between Paul and Barnabus] that they separated from one another, and Barnabus took [John] Mark with him and sailed to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed to the grace of the Lord.”
* In Galatians chapter 2, we read that “when Cephas [Peter] came to Antioch,” Paul “opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.”

And these are just a few of many examples found in Scripture.

The question isn’t whether the Church will have disagreements – even serious ones – but whether we will handle them in a loving, Christ-like manner.

That said, the long-term answer is “yes, absolutely.”

Jesus prayed we would be perfected in unity – and in eternity we absolutely will be.

Jesus doesn’t pray things that don’t come to pass.

God is a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God – and we can be certain the Father will do what the Son has asked.

In I Corinthians 1:10, the Apostle Paul wrote, “Now, I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

On the face of it, this seems impossible.

In the natural realm, it is impossible.

But “nothing is impossible with God.” (Luke 1:37)

And we can rest assured that in due time, God will make us one.

Indeed, as Paul wrote in Philippians 1:6, “I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

**Question #3: What, then, does all this mean for the Church in the Epicenter?**

If we are honest, we have to admit that today there are serious divisions within the Messianic Jewish Body here in the Land of Israel.

Serious divisions amongst Arab Evangelicals in Israel. And amongst Palestinian Evangelicals. And amongst other Arab Evangelicals in the region. And between all these movements.

Some of these divisions are theological and eschatological in nature – and they are not insignificant; indeed, some of these divisions run deep.

Many of these are political in nature – especially about the ownership of the Land and the history of the wars and tensions and injustices committed by Jews against Arabs, and by Arabs against Jews, particularly over the last century.

Still other divisions are personal in nature.

* This family won’t talk to that family.
* This pastor can’t stand that pastor.
* This sister resents that sister.
* This brother is jealous of that brother.
* And so forth.

I’ve been coming in and out of the Land for three decades, observing both as an outsider and in the last four years as someone who lives here, and I’m not saying these divisions in the Church are unique. Sadly, they occur in every country and region in the world.

But we must ask ourselves: As Jewish and Arab believers, do we really expect God to pour out His Holy Spirit and set into motion the salvation and redemption of millions of people in our region if we as the Body of Christ refuse to humble ourselves and pursue peace with one another?

Or let me ask it another way: If we as Jewish and Arab believers cannot or will not live in John 13 love and John 17 unity with each other, how can we possibly persuade our peoples that we truly have a personal relationship with the Prince of Peace and have the Ultimate Answer to the problems of this lost world and divided region?

I submit we cannot.

Don’t get me wrong...

* I’m not saying it’s easy to love people on all sides and walk in John 13 love and John 17 unity – it’s not.
* I’m not saying I have always done this well -- I have not and have needed to ask forgiveness from my brothers and sisters.
* I’m not saying that I or The Joshua Fund is perfectly walking in unity -- unfortunately, we have and continue to make mistakes.
* Indeed, I’m not saying that one side or the other necessarily needs to give up deeply held convictions on issues that matter deeply to them. Believers all over the world disagree on many issues, from the role of women in the Church, to the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, to the proper interpretation of eschatology, to name just a few. Should it really be surprising, then, that Israeli and Palestinian believers disagree on the theology of the Land, or how to fairly and compassionately resolve the most contentious geopolitical division in the history of the world?
* Nor am I saying that we should pursue “peace” and “unity” at all costs, ignoring heresies, false prophets, false teachers and/or every wind of false doctrine – not at all. The Bible teaches there are lines we cannot cross, and now more than ever we absolutely must stand for the truth.

What I am saying is that we need to pray that God would humble each of us in His Church in the Epicenter, purify us, heal our deepest wounds and help us build bridges of friendship and trust with each other because we are brothers and sisters in Christ.

I am asking you to pray for us that we as Israeli and Palestinian believers, and all the believers in this region, would treat each other with honor and respect, and that we would allow brothers to hold different theological and political views without freaking out, without attacking and demeaning one another, especially in public.

I am asking you to pray that we would all be more careful with what we say in public and in private, what we post on social media, and say in the media.

Pray we will heed the words of Paul in Ephesians 4:29, *“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.”*

Above all, pray that we have a unity of purpose and great clarity with regards to our calling.

The mission of the Church is to preach the Gospel to every Jew and Gentile, to teach the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, to make disciples, to plant churches, to train pastors, to pray and worship, to love our neighbors and our enemies.

No one else can do this – not governments, not business, not academia or the media.

Only the Church has this calling and when we are unified around our purpose we will experience great power and bear much fruit.

Pray, then, that even when we disagree on matters that we care deeply and passionately about, that we can still love each other and not let such disagreements distract us from fulfilling the Great Commission.

Too often we can act as “cheerleaders” for “one side” – theologically, and/or politically – rather than as brothers and sisters in Christ advancing the same Kingdom.

Yet part of loving others is hearing their story, listening over a long, lingering meal, asking questions to really get to know their passions and their fears and their dreams and their struggles, and then discerning where we might be able to help our fellow believers in tangible ways to relieve their suffering or provide what’s lacking.

**As a new immigrant to this Land, I ask Evangelicals in the West and around the world to get to know and love and stand with Messianic Jewish believers, to understand their unique challenges and to be faithful in praying for them and financially supporting them.**

* God is breathing new life into His Church here and it’s exciting.
* But there are many challenges and we must come alongside the Body here and help them grow and thrive.

**At the same time, I ask the Evangelical Church to love and strengthen the Palestinian Church, as well.**

* Treat them as equals, as true brothers and sisters in Christ.
* Pray for them.
* Invest in them.
* Make sure they are not ignored or forgotten or demeaned.
* Give them opportunities to tell their story and to truly be heard and understood and prayed for and supported because they, too, are deeply loved by Christ, and deeply valued by the Father.

When it comes to Israel and her neighbors, God is not “either/or.”

God is “both/and.”

Shouldn’t you and I be, as well?

Indeed, this is why when Lynn and I founded The Joshua Fund twelve years ago, in the summer of 2006, we made it our mission to bless Israel AND her neighbors in the name of Jesus.

We and our team are passionate about coming alongside the Church in the Epicenter to encourage and unite, not to discourage and divide. And we stand ready to serve, as God enables, as a trusted resource to believers around the world who have a heart to bless Jews and Arabs and invest in the ministries in the region but need and want help to know how to do so as wisely and effectively as possible.

**Conclusion**

As I conclude, let me say again that my team and I see many signs of hope.

The divisions I spoke of are real.

But we also see a healthy dynamic underway in and between the Messianic believers and Arab Evangelicals.

* We see more and more Jewish and Arab pastors reaching out to one another to break bread and build friendships and meet together for prayer.
* We see some even inviting one another to preach in each other’s pulpits and speak at each other’s conferences.
* We see Jewish and Arab believers – lay people – studying the Word and praying and worshiping together.
* We’re seeing groups of Israeli and Palestinian pastors developing joint documents emphasizing the importance of working together to advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
* We’ve seen the recent formation of the Alliance for the Peace of Jerusalem – a group I helped found – bringing together a diverse group of theologians and Bible teachers around a shared set of core Biblical principles, including the central importance of fostering unity and reconciliation between Jewish and Arab and Iranian believers.

Is this enough? No, it’s not.

Is it progress? It certainly is.

Is it a sign the Lord is at work to build His Church and ready His bride for His return? Absolutely. And for this we can – and should – rejoice.

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