

Jesus prays for his disciples' protection

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[0:00] We hear that Jesus so loves His disciples that He prays for their and our spiritual protection.! This week we're very much going to hear the heart of Jesus for His disciples.

! This week we had our last ever primary school parent consultation. And it was really nice to spend time with a P7 teacher who had invested a lot in terms of education, character, trying to build confidence.

And His last words were all about having a healthy concern for ongoing progress. Knowing the next phase of high school was about to begin, eager that Seb continue on in his educational career. Different conditions need new provisions. Jesus has been with His disciples for the last three years. Every day He has been physically with them, their teacher and their master.

He has protected them in their lives of faith. But now, as we hear at the beginning of the chapter, His hour has come. He's about to depart.

[1:12] He's going to go to the cross, then there'll be the resurrection, and then He'll return to the glory of heaven. And so here He takes time to ask His Father to continue the good work of protecting them spiritually.

That Jesus' loving concern for His disciples remains. This prayer is often called the High Priestly Prayer. And that's a really helpful title for this section.

Because remember, Jesus is praying out loud so His disciples can hear. He wants to encourage them. He wants to strengthen the disciples as they listen in.

The disciples knew all about the work of the High Priest. They saw Him get dressed up. They knew that He wore the name of God's people on His shoulders and wore them on a breastplate on His heart as He would go into God's presence once a year.

And that's exactly the image that we get of Jesus. His people are on His heart. He bears them on His shoulders. He carries us and our needs into our Father's presence.

[2:26] And so we're going to think about that this evening. Three very basic questions. First of all, who does Jesus pray for? Secondly, what does Jesus pray for? And thirdly, why do we need this prayer for ourselves?

So question one, who does Jesus pray for? But again, just to press on this, that we are invited into the loving heart of Jesus. Because think about it.

He knows that He has already entered into a dark time, a season of sorrow. He's about to go to the cross. He's going to take the cup of God's wrath and He's going to drink it to the dregs.

He's literally going to walk into the darkness as He is judged for the sin of His people. That hour is upon Him, yet here He takes time to pray for His friends.

And as He prays, they get to listen in. And so do we. And every word and every phrase matters because they are given and we are given powerful reminders that disciples of Jesus, they are those who are saved by God's grace.

[3:29] And disciples of Jesus are those who are deeply loved. This prayer isn't, because Jesus could immediately have gone, Father, I'm praying for my disciples, protect them.

But He takes time to express truths about them, to show characteristics of the Christian. Some from God's perspective, thinking about salvation.

Some from a human point of view. But He makes absolutely clear in this prayer that He prays for those who are saved by His power and His grace.

Look at how He begins this section of His prayer. Verse 6, Or verse 9, What's really clear as we listen to Jesus are that disciples are those who've been given to Jesus the Son by God the Father.

And so what's really clear is that they belong both to God the Son and they belong to God the Father. And they belong to God the Father even before Jesus' ministry.

[4:46] We're being invited again to recognize this eternal election. Love before the world was even made. Chosen before the world was created. God loves His people.

God loves these disciples because He freely chose to love and to save them. And what we hear in Jesus' prayer is an aspect of covenant love.

It's followers of Jesus bound to God the Father, bound to God the Son in steadfast, faithful covenant love from all eternity and forever.

Disciples who are saved by God's grace have been given to the Son from out of the world. Did you hear that emphasis? Verse 6, I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world.

Verse 9, I'm not praying for the world but for those you have given me. Maybe we're familiar with that idea of being in the world but not of the world. Christians have been given a new identity.

[5:52] So, we are called to live here on this earth as foreigners with our true home in heaven with Christ. And so, we should live our days differently.

Some of us, I know, watch race across the world. And this week, teams ended up in Mongolia. And they were dropped into Mongolia, taking a flight over China.

And the territory they entered, it felt like another world to so many of them. Totally different language. Totally different way of life. Entirely different customs.

Really hard to enter in. And every point on that journey, they were clearly different foreigners, strangers. Jesus says that's our identity as those who are in Christ.

In the world but not of the world. In the world but at the same time called out of the world to be given to Jesus. Important to say that in John's gospel, sometimes Jesus will use that word world in a really specific way.

[6:58] Not talking about the earth, geography, but thinking about a system or a set of people who live in opposition to God and His kingdom.

The world are those whose hearts and desires are fixed on this world, not on heaven. Those who are seeking glory for themselves in this world, not seeking the glory of God.

And truly, that's the condition of each and every person who has ever lived. But the prayer of Jesus reminds us that out of that mess of sinful rebellion, God chooses to reach down and pluck some out to bring to Himself.

Not because they have earned it, but because God delights to be gracious and to give a people to His Son. And so, as we listen to Jesus' prayer, we're being reminded of the power of God.

That authority properly belongs to Him. He is the creator, He is the King. And this same powerful God who created the world by speaking it into existence, with that same power raising Jesus from the dead, with that same power gives us new life in Christ and gives us to Christ.

[8:16] The God of all power acts in Christ Jesus to set us free, as we were thinking about this morning, to redeem us from Satan and from sin that leads to death, through the death of Jesus on the cross.

We were reminded a couple of weeks ago that the U.S. government recently spent around \$300 million to rescue a single airman who was lost in Iran.

The gospel reminds us that the Lord God of heaven paid the ultimate cost, infinite cost of His Son, His blood shed on the cross, to redeem and to set us free, to deliver us from enemy territory, to bring us home to our God.

And so, as we listen to Jesus' prayer, He's putting the power of God on display, but also the grace of God. Nothing in these disciples merits His mercy.

Nothing in us merits His mercy. We are by nature sinful rebels. Our hearts and wills are set against God. We break His laws.

[9:27] We break relationship with God. But He freely in love gives His Son for us and gives us to His Son so that all praise and glory belongs to Him.

So, He takes a number of verses to really focus in His prayer on, here is what God has done for these people who have been given to Him to show His power and grace.

But also notice that Jesus prays for those who believe God's Word about Jesus, the Messiah King. Because this is another emphasis. Verse 6, You gave them to Me, and they have obeyed Your Word.

I gave them, verse 8, the words You gave Me, and they accepted them. End of verse 10, Glory has come to Me through them. And so, He's praying for these 11 apostles, recognizing that these 11, they've been with Jesus from the beginning.

They heard the call of Jesus into discipleship, come, follow Me, and they responded in faith. They heard Jesus preach, The kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe the good news. [10:39] And they believe that He is God's King, and that His coming is good news, and that salvation is found nowhere else but in Jesus. In John chapter 6, we get to that point where many people are offended by Jesus.

Big crowds have been following, but they begin to turn away from Jesus. And He says to His disciples, Will you also leave? And they say, To whom else will we turn? You alone have the words of eternal life.

They believe God's Word about the Messiah King. Now, their obedience is not perfect. We know that they have many misunderstandings. They misunderstand the nature of the kingdom, and so they fight with pride to be top dog.

We hear Peter, Jesus, You shall never suffer. It's not fitting for the Messiah to go to the cross.

Jesus, You shall never wash my feet, far be it from You to act as a servant.

And shortly, they will fail Him at His point of need. Watch and pray with me, so they fall asleep.

When it's the time for Jesus' arrest, they turn and run.

[11:50] So, their obedience is not perfect, but it is true obedience. They have responded in faith and belief. Compared to the others that we meet in the Gospels, it becomes evident that the seed of God's Word, it has been planted in their hearts and has found good soil.

They are those who've been enabled by Jesus to preach good news and to perform miracles in Jesus' name. At great cost to themselves, they have confessed that Jesus is Lord, that He is God's promised Messiah, Savior, King.

And so, He prays. Two wonderful truths, I think, as we think about who Jesus prays for. There's the wonderful truth of the Gospel, that God saves sinners.

Here we are reminded, even as Jesus prays, that the three persons of the Trinity, well, here it says the Father and Son in focus, but they work together in wisdom and power to achieve the salvation of a chosen people.

That the Father in love elects before the creation of the world, and the Son in love fulfills the Father's plan by redeeming that chosen people. And the Spirit, well, He shows the love of God by giving the gift of new life.

[13:15] And in this work of salvation, it's God who does everything. He's the one who plans it. He's the one who, through Jesus, achieves it. He is the one who gives the free gift of salvation. And He gives it to sinners.

Those, again, who are by nature guilty. Blind to our need and blind to the wonder of God. Helpless and hopeless. Dead in our trespasses and sins. Unable to lift a finger to save ourselves so that salvation is seen to belong to God.

That God gets all the glory in saving these disciples, in saving any disciples. And it's also wonderfully clear, as we listen to the prayer of Jesus and we hear His heart, that Jesus loves His disciples and Jesus loves imperfect disciples.

Like us, sometimes mixed up and sometimes we mess up, yet the steadfast love of the Lord Jesus endures. And the reality is that now in heaven, He still loves His own, He keeps on praying, and He seeks our protection.

So that's who Jesus prays for. But now we need to ask ourselves, but what does Jesus pray for? And that's there in verses 11 and 12.

[14:41] Again, just to remind ourselves the context for this prayer. Verse 1, Father, the hour has come. So Jesus is aware that His departure is coming. He's aware of the gap His disciples are going to feel.

He's always been present with them, but now He's leaving. And so in His heart, He loves them. And so He prays that His Father would protect and keep. And remember, He's doing this all out loud. And so here are the disciples, and this is a prayer to strengthen and fortify their faith.

Remember last week, we heard Jesus pray, and He reminded them as they listened in that they were held by their loving Father and held by Jesus.

And now we are being reminded that the disciples of Jesus are protected by God's powerful name. I will remain in the world no longer, Jesus says in verse 11, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you.

[15:50] Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your name, the name You gave me, so they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name You gave me.

None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. Think about what's going on in this way. When somebody we love, at a human level, is going through difficulty, going through a personal crisis or a testing time, don't we feel that they're always on our mind and in our heart?

Sometimes we find ourselves actively praying for them, but even when we're not, don't we find it can be hard to focus on what we're supposed to give ourselves to? We feel distracted because we're worried about them.

It's still always on our heart. Jesus' heart is bigger than ours. His love is wider than ours. He knows better than we do what His disciples will go through, and from His loving heart.

When His disciples are on His heart and His mind, He prays to commit them to the love of His Father. He is the high priest who bears His people on His heart.

[17:07] And here we discover Him praying for their protection. They've already begun to see what it costs to be a follower of Jesus. But last week, we were thinking about that message.

Jesus said, if they hated Me, they'll hate you also. He knows His disciples in days to come will face trial and temptation and persecution and prison for His sake.

He knows that they need the protection of God. Notice too, in verse 11, the way Jesus addresses God.

It's the only time in all of the Gospels that we hear Jesus pray, Holy Father. And that suggests a few things to us.

I think it certainly suggests to us that in Jesus' mind, it is spiritual protection, it is soul protection that we need the most. God's people need to be guarded so that they might live holy lives.

[18:16] And so, Jesus asks His Holy Father, the fountain and source of true holiness, to protect His set-apart people that they might live set-apart lives, come what may.

He calls Him Holy Father. And Jesus prays for God's children. And so, we're also inclined to think about the idea of family likeness.

Just as in a human family, traits and character and speech are often passed down the generations, Jesus prays to His Holy Father that by His grace and power, He would increasingly make His children holy, conforming them, conforming us to be more and more like Jesus.

Jesus knows that the root of holiness in God's people stems from the relationship that we have with God as our Father through the Lord Jesus.

And so, He prays that there would be more conformity to be more like God the Father in holiness. God Himself declares that within His Word.

[19:34] He wants us to imitate this attribute book of Leviticus. Be holy because I am holy. And so, Jesus prays to His Holy Father knowing that the Holy Father wants to see holiness in us and He knows our weakness and He knows the only way we're going to grow in holiness is if God works powerfully in us.

And so, this prayer is the reason why we are shaped and grow in holiness. It's also striking to think about the moment at which Jesus prays, Holy Father.

He is facing the reality of His own suffering. He is facing the prospect of going to the cross. He faces the grim reality for Him of feeling forsaken of His Father as He becomes the sin bearer of the world.

Yet here, as He lifts His gaze to heaven, there's that sense of wonder and awe. His Father is holy and pure and perfect and righteous and good.

And His deep desire is that His people would reflect His holiness. And so, He prays to His Holy Father that His followers would be protected and kept, verse 11, by the power of God's name.

[21:03] That for those of us who are Christians, Jesus is praying that we would become more loyal to God, that we would be growing in love, that we'd be living in line with the character of God, we'd be coming more like Jesus as we are kept and shaped by God's mighty hand.

Jesus prays that these disciples would be faithful to the Word of God that they believed about Jesus so that they would continue to trust and to share the good news that Jesus truly is God's King sent from heaven to save from sin and death.

He prays at the end of verse 11 that they may be one as we are one, that His disciples would be united in the love of the Father and the Son, but they'd also be united as apostles committed to Jesus as Messiah and His mission in the world.

And so we get the sense of here is the heart of Jesus where He longs is that His disciples would be protected, that God's name would be honored, that God's kingdom would come in their lives.

And we know that because Jesus prays the Father's will and because Jesus seeks the Father's glory and because Jesus is the Son of God, His prayers must be answered.

[22 : 29] And so God will protect His disciples, His followers, His children. And so again for us as Christians, here is where our security lies, not in ourselves, but in our God and in particular here on the praying life of Jesus, our great High Priest.

As so many studies tell us, children who grow up in stable, protective environments tend to thrive and have more confidence and have more resilience because they have that secure home life.

How much more for the people of God, for the children of God, are we invited to find real strength, real security, and even real sleep as we know the God of the universe protects His people.

The Lord who never slumbers or sleeps always has His eye on His people, on His church. And as we listen into the prayer of Jesus, we're reminded here is where our hope is found, not in our strength, not in our resources, but the reality that the Lord God is on our side.

And since God is for us, who can be against us? That this prayer must be answered and so this protection that Jesus seeks will be ours if we are in Christ from the beginning of our life with Jesus until eternity.

[24 : 11] So Jesus prays for our protection. Thirdly, and just to really kind of drill down on this, why do we need this prayer?

So we've been in John 17 for the last few weeks and the basic idea that we keep returning to is Jesus is our mediator and so He prays this prayer for us. As the sinless Son of God, this prayer is answered.

But Jesus is also our model and so we understand well if Jesus prays this for us, well it must be important. It's something that we should desire for ourselves and pray for ourselves and we should pray for others.

So we'll close with this. We'll close with five reasons and there's lots more I'm sure but there's five reasons at least why we need this prayer of Jesus and why you and I should pray it for others.

You know, Holy Father, start from ourselves, protect me, protect my family, protect my church leaders, protect my church family, protect ministers and missionaries around the world.

[25 : 10] Why? Here's why we need this prayer. First of all, because holiness is hard and we find that to be the case. Living for God is not straightforward. The world is not holy.

In fact, the world is often hostile to God and His ways. Holiness is not highly prized in the world today. It doesn't open many doors. It doesn't get us much by way of approval and when we honestly reflect, sometimes we recognize holiness feels a lot more like battle and struggle and sometimes short-term happiness seems an awful lot easier.

Shopping and scrolling and watching and relaxing, that seems easier than the disciplines of grace and seeking to grow in holiness and Jesus knows us and Jesus knows that.

So, He prays to His Father for us. Protect them so they will persevere. Holy Father, may Your name be so powerful and beautiful in their thoughts that they will choose holiness even when it's hard, even when it hurts.

And so, we are encouraged to pray for ourselves and to pray for one another. Protect us, Father, from giving in or giving up. Keep our eyes fixed on our loving Savior and the sure prospect of eternal reward.

[26 : 34] Father, as You have promised, finish the good work You have begun in our hearts. We need Him and we need His protection because holiness is hard.

Here's the second reason why we need this prayer. Because sin makes us senseless. Sin, to use Calvin's word, makes us stupid.

The Bible tells us sin is lawlessness. Sin is illogical. Sin is against reason. Sin is a contradiction of who we truly are in Christ.

In Christ, we are declared to be saints. We are children of God. We are set apart as holy. But each one of us who are Christians here, we know sadly that as Christians, we make and often make foolish choices and we choose reckless behaviors and we speak terrible words and we go back to

old habits and we reap destruction as we go and often we find ourselves bearing the scars of our guilt and our shame and Jesus knows us and Jesus knows that and so He prays, Father, they will need Your help.

We know our own hearts to some degree and so as we think about the need to be protected spiritually, we're invited to pray, help me.

[28:04] Help me fight against sin. Help others to fight against sin, not to be captured by it. Help us to believe in any given moment that our Father in Heaven is so powerful and good that He can help us choose holiness when naturally we'd want to give in to temptation.

Protect us. Give us eyes to see sin for what it is. Sin is like a contagious virus. Think of all the precautions we take for human medical viruses.

Spiritually, we ask God's help to be wise that we might be protected, that our church and our churches might be protected. Here's a third reason why we need this prayer, why the disciples needed it and why we need it.

Because others will oppose us. Jesus knows that enemies are literally coming up the hill and will soon arrest Him and persecute Him and kill Him.

And Jesus knows that His friends and His followers will also come into the firing line. Now, Jesus was the most loving man who ever lived. Gave Himself to caring for the weak and the poor.

[29:20] He helped people. He healed people. He offered dignity. He gave forgiveness. He gave eternal life. But He was spat on and mocked and abused and rejected and finally executed.

And so others will oppose us. And so, Jesus prays for us. Father, help them.

Protect them because without the protection of our God, we will choose to compromise or we will hide in a corner or we will simply turn and give up.

and so we need to pray for strength and protection. Help me, help us to make Jesus non-ignorable to the people around me.

Help us to live a set-apart life even if no one else around me is. Help me to be a consistent light source in places of darkness.

[30:26] Protect me. here's a fourth reason why we need to pray this prayer for spiritual protection and keeping because the mission of God matters.

Robert Murray McShane, the famous preacher from St. Peter's in Dundee in the 19th century famously said, my people's greatest need is my personal holiness. For anybody to represent a holy God, well, we need to practice holiness.

There needs to be something of the character of God in our lives. We need to follow in the way of Jesus. And so we need to be protected in our holiness for the sake of God's mission.

The flip side, think about the danger of unholiness. When people see that in the church, that's what turns people off. That's what gives people an excuse to not believe, to point at the church and say, see, I told you so.

Following Jesus is worthless. Jesus knew what His disciples would face. Jesus knew His disciples' natural fears and so He prays for them.

[31:36] Father, protect them in this mission that we have given to them because the world needs those apostles. And God heard that prayer and God answered that prayer and so those apostles, they preached the message of Jesus and His saving work.

and they wrote down the New Testament that we have in our hands and they planted churches that would change the Roman Empire and change the world. They would give their lives in service of the kingdom of God.

And in the same manner, we pray, please keep me, help us to walk in the truth. Help me day by day to live in love.

enable me to be a good ambassador. Think about where you find yourself on the front lines and where the mission of God matters but where the challenges are greatest and pray and pray for one another in the heat of battle.

Fifth and final reason why we need this prayer is because it gives us a chance to hear Jesus' heart of love for His children, for His people. because sometimes life is really tough as a Christian.

[32:51] Sometimes it's like the sky turns black and the storms roll in. Sometimes as Christians we find ourselves asking God, are you there? God, do you care?

And in those times we cannot trust in our feelings and our senses but what we can trust in the feelings of Jesus for us.

the steadfast love of Jesus, the heart of Jesus for His people, God's covenant love for His own which will never shift. Jesus will always be the great high priest for His people.

He is always carrying us on His shoulders. He is always bearing us on His heart. He is always taking our needs, our concerns, our prayers to His Father in heaven.

The one who prays for the disciples, the one who prays for us is the one who loved us and willingly faced the hour of the cross to save us. And now that Jesus is in heaven, He loves us still.

[34 : 00] And because of that love, He will protect us. God will protect us to the very end and into eternity. let's pray together.

God our Father, we thank You for the way Jesus' prayer gives us a name. Amen.