

Jesus prays for the apostles

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[0 : 00] It's a living word, so we believe, and as we open God's word and do him the honour of listening to what he's saying, we trust his promises that he will speak to us in such a way as to change our lives and bring us one day to heaven.

And we are looking at John 17, which is a prayer, or we could almost say the prayer that Jesus prayed.

If you could overhear God talking to himself, what would that be like? Maybe when you were little, you might have heard mum and dad talking to each other, might have overheard them and wondered what on earth they were talking about.

But as an older person now, you might realise what it would be like for a child to overhear his or her parents talking.

Well, as we come to John 17, we are overhearing what God is saying, what Jesus is saying to his father. And he wants us to overhear this. Why does he want us to hear this?

[1 : 12] Well, the bit that we're looking at today, I think, addresses questions like this. There are lots of old stories. The Bible is an old story.

How do we know we can trust the people who wrote the Bible? Well, here's another way of asking a similar question. There seem to be lots of versions of Christianity.

If you've ever been to other churches, you will know they're not all like this one. And is this way of doing church right and the other wrong, or what?

How can we know which is the sort of Christianity that Jesus wanted? And that's included in this amazing prayer.

And I hope, and I think this is what Jesus was intending, that as we overhear him talking to his father, it will enable us to be strong and confident believers.

[2 : 16] Let me give you a couple of examples of where you might need confidence and you might not have it. And I bought a phone battery off eBay last week.

And the advertisement said, genuine Motorola phone battery from somewhere which it said was in Salford.

However, when I got the battery, it was not a genuine Motorola battery at all. It was just an ordinary copy battery. Because I hadn't gone to an authorised dealer.

However, I'd gone to so-and-so, so-and-so in Salford. And when I tried to return the battery, they said, oh, you've got to return it all the way to China. Which seemed a little bit of a strange situation. So getting your stuff from an authorised dealer who is the person that Motorola have said, we'll give our batteries to you, you sell them to other people.

[3 : 13] Where do you go to get real Christianity? And let me give you another example. When I was a student at Sussex University, one of my friends worked in the University of Sussex library.

And the bit of the library where he had his desk was on the join between that bit of the library and that bit of the library. And that was the join. And bits of it kept falling onto his desk.

And I asked him, why are bits of the library falling onto your desk? He said, well, this is the extension. That's the old bit. They're on two different foundations. And that foundation is steadily working its way towards Falmer Station.

And this bit of the foundation steadily works its way towards the South Downs. And between them there's a gap. And the gap keeps falling on my desk. So getting a good, solid foundation.

It's important for a building. But it's also so important for our faith. A good, solid foundation. And that's what I think this passage is about. And because it's there, I'm going to talk about it.

[4 : 16] And we've asked God to help us as we do so. So let me make a few more introductory remarks. I'll get going in a minute. But here's some introductory remarks.

Jesus is praying to his Father. So we're treading on holy ground. Don't be surprised if we don't understand everything that he says. Or it blows our minds.

Or we think, whoa, I know, I can't quite cope with that. It's God talking to God. But you wouldn't expect that we would understand everything as if it was trivial and simple. We might expect a perspective that gives us reason to pause.

And that's certainly true in this part that we're looking at. There are three sections to the prayer. In order, verses 1 to 5, Jesus speaks to his Father about what he has been given.

And the work that he has completed. We talked about that last time. I won't repeat it.

[5 : 20] In verses 6 to 19, he has a prayer about these people, the apostolic group, which I'll explain in a moment. And in verse 20, he gets on to us.

Verse 20 says, my prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.

So that's us. We believe through their message. But up to that point, Jesus is praying for them. It's not first and foremost about us, actually.

But it is about the way Jesus is planning and anticipating the expansion of faith across the world and down through history.

Jesus is, if you like, laying the foundation for how things are going to go on in the future. And laying the foundation is an important thing. So who are these people?

[6 : 23] They are, you might call them the disciples. In another place, they're called eyewitnesses. And there isn't such a word, but it's nice if there would be such a word.

Ear witnesses. So they saw things. They heard with their own ears. And there certainly isn't such a thing as a touch witness. But it would be nice if there were words. Because they say, we saw with our eyes.

We heard with our ears. We touched with our hands. So these are the people that did all that. And they are the sent ones. Jesus says he's going to send them. And the word for sending, as Greek is *apostello*, from which you get apostles.

So they're the sent ones. And apostles is a good word for that. And the adjective from the noun apostle is apostolic. So if I say apostolic, I'm meaning the apostolic group is the group of apostles. It's not a word we usually use. But you sort of can't avoid using it in this connection. And this then is the foundation on which the church of Jesus Christ is built.

[7 : 30] In another place, it talks about built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. That's the group he's talking about. These are the foundation of our faith.

So let's find out what he says. So have I got a picture there? Yeah, I've got a picture there. What have I said about it? This is the, so this is, I'm going to use this picture again and again.

So let's see if we can get the different parts of it. Here's a circle representing the son. Here's a circle representing the father. Here's a circle representing the world.

Here's a circle representing this group for whom he's praying, the apostles, the apostolic group. And 12 would be the right number.

You know, one of them is defected. So it's just 11 at the moment. But the symbolic number for this core group would be actually 12. And Jesus directs his attention in a sense to them and to the father.

[8 : 34] And there's different relationships that go on there. So chapter 17, he says, verse 6, no, verse 1, Jesus looked towards heaven and prayed.

After he had said this, he looked towards heaven and prayed. In verse 6 he says, I have revealed you to those you gave me out of the world.

I have revealed you to those you gave me out of the world. So let's try and do a little bit of detail. It's always, I find it difficult to try and get John's line of argument into a manageable form.

So I've done my best with this. And I thought the best way to try and get it into manageable form is to ask a few questions. So the first question is, how does Jesus describe the people for whom he is praying?

So I'm looking forward to the answer. Let's see what it says here. So, number one, he spent three years with them. That's quite a good amount of time, isn't it?

[9 : 49] If you're somebody who's been to a university, you've probably had a three-year course. That's time to learn a lot. And Jesus has been with these people for three years or thereabouts.

And he says earlier on in chapter 15, verse 15, I no longer call you servants. I have called you friends.

He says, for everything I've heard from the Father, I've made known to you. So that's interesting, isn't it? He says, who are these people? They're not just any old 12 people.

These are my friends. And he's praying for his friends. And for some, yeah, I'm getting out of order here.

Let me just do the 15, verse 13. Jesus has said to them, greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

[10:54] So let's take that into account too. They're not just buddies. Spent three years with them. All go their separate ways afterwards or something like that.

He says that he so much loves these people that he lays down his life for them. Now, at the time he said it, I don't think they really understood what he was saying.

But they look back on it and it all makes profound sense. And let me just ask you, what would it be like if somebody that you were sitting in, you know, around a meal table with, as this was, and the person said to you, this is a grown-up person with their head screwed on, says, I love you so much, I'm going to lay down my life for you.

I think that would be quite something, don't you? I mean, that is, I suppose the most engaging thing that people here might have had is if somebody proposed marriage to you.

I love you so much, I want to spend the rest of my life with you. Well, that would be a big thing, wouldn't it? It seems to me that this is even bigger.

[12:27] That the person doesn't just say, if it came to it, I would, I hope, lay down my life for you. But this person sort of looks them in the eye and says, I love you so much, I am going to lay down my life for you.

That's love, isn't it? That's a very striking thing. And then I would like you to just move on and say, he said it to them sort of eyeball to eyeball.

But he says that to every Christian. Although not eyeball to eyeball, he definitely says it heart to heart. I love you so much.

But I have laid down my life for you. Quite something to grasp that. He laid down his life for these people.

They are people who've been given to him by the father out of the world. So let's just look at the verses which say this.

[13:33] In verse 2, he says, you gave him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.

So the father, there's a lot of giving going on. There's a lot of generosity in this whole prayer. But he gives these people to the son.

And they come out of the world because of this gift. It's there in verse 6 as well. I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world.

They were yours. You gave them to me. And Jesus seems pretty clear that the thing that has migrated them, whoops, from the world to this circle of belonging to him, is the gift of the father.

Father, you gave them out of the world. And why on earth have I put that there? It made sense when I did that.

[14:45] Yes, I think I've just got out of order. So they are effectively migrated from the world to Christ by the gift of the father. With a view to being sent into the world on gospel mission.

He says, doesn't he, at the end. Verse 18. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. So how does Jesus describe these people?

They're his friends. He lays down his life for them. They've been given to him by the father out of the world. And they are sent into the world. That's the green arrow.

And there's you and me. Out there in the world with the apostles sent to us on gospel mission. And if we ever became Christians, it would be because we heard the word of these guys brought to us as we were in the world.

Okay. How does Jesus describe those people? That's how he describes them. And it also includes a description of us. A Christian person is somebody who believes their word.

[15:54] It's there in verse 20. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message. So I could ask whether you've believed the message of the apostles.

It's not quite the same thing as saying, do you go to church regularly? It's not quite the same thing as saying, were you baptized as a baby? It's not quite the same thing as saying, do you go to mass or communion or Eucharist?

It's a different question. It says, do you have faith? Do you believe the word that the apostles brought? The message of the gospel.

Just like we said at the beginning. Here's the message summed up. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. That's what Paul said, summing it up. Do you believe the word?

That's what he's talking about. Let's move on. What has Jesus done to or for these people? So let's go through the verses and pick out what he's done to them or for them.

[16:56] So I did use a past tense, what has he done? Because as Jesus prays this prayer, he's very conscious that there is a time scale. He's going to leave the world.

So he's going to stop doing some things that perhaps he has been doing or is about to do. What does it say? Verse 6. I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world.

So one thing he's done, he's revealed. Actually, what it actually says is I have revealed your name to those you gave me out of the world.

So Jesus has revealed the name of the Father to these people.

And we find in verse 11 that Jesus says, Protect them through the power of your name, the name you gave me.

[17:58] So you can see how it all fits together. But it does take a little bit of doing to fit it together. I think I might be able to write that on there.

If I'm, yeah, okay. Now, can I do this? Maybe not. No, it didn't work, did it? Oh, how sad.

It worked when I did it at home. Let's try again. Okay. Where did I get to? Did that bit?

I'm going to try and write the word, write name on there, but I suspect it's not going to work. Nah.

No. Go on then. No. Well, I'm really sad about that because I thought I'd found a way of writing on there, but it is not to be. Let's carry on anyway.

[19:04] So what I meant to put there is the name. The Father gives the name to the Son, and the Son reveals the name to the apostles. That's what it says.

The name being the character, the fullness. The fullness of being, the fullness of action, the fullness of purpose.

So the Father gives the name to the Son. That's what it says. You gave me that name. It's in verse 12. And then the Son reveals that name to the apostolic group.

I showed to them, I demonstrated to them, the fullness of your character. The fullness of your being. The fullness of your actions.

The fullness of your purposes. Says Jesus, I revealed your name to these people. They're the ones you gave me. I've revealed your name to them.

[20:11] That's what I've done. Let's see what he says in verse 8. I gave them the words you gave me, and they received them.

So if I were able to write on there, I would have done, but I'll just indicate it. The Father gives words to the Son, and the Son gives the words to this group of people.

That's what it says. Let's repeat it. Verse 8 says, I gave them the words you gave me, and they accepted them.

And in verse 14, it says, I have given them your word, and the world has hated them. So you think, if I was writing John's Gospel, I wouldn't have put that.

But Jesus, this is what Jesus says. He says that the Father has given him words, and he has faithfully transmitted them to this group. So these are the people.

[21:15] It's not about us. It's them. They have seen the fullness of who God is through Jesus Christ. They have revealed, they have had revealed to them the words that the Father gave the Son, and the Son gives them to this group of people, and they accept them.

He says, this is, you know, mission accomplished, in a sense. And it is effective. So he says, the effect on them is as follows.

Let's see, which verse am I on? Didn't put the verses there, so we'll have to find them. They have, verse 6, they have kept your word.

You gave, that whole sentence, I have revealed your name to those you gave me out of the world. They were yours. You gave them to me, and they have kept your word.

So Jesus was not bashing his head against a brick wall trying to teach them, and they end up, you know, don't even get grade C. They get it.

[22 : 22] They've received these words. And now he says, look at them. They know and believe. So these people have become convinced. I mean, they've got, in a sort of cloudy way, but they have, in principle, got it.

Verse 7, now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me, verse 8, and they accepted them.

They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. So he puts into a nutshell what it is that they've grasped. They've grasped something about the power of Jesus' words.

They know, I wish I'd put the verse numbers here. It makes life so much easier, wouldn't it? Verse 7, they know that everything you have given me comes from you. So when they hear things from Jesus, they've come to realize this isn't just Jesus' own bright ideas.

These are the words of God. So they know the full divine quality of Jesus' words. And they also know who he is. Verse 8, they know with certainty that I came from you and have believed that you sent me.

[23 : 45] So they've got an idea of who is Jesus. He came from the Father. He's not a super angel who lived somewhere near the Father.

And he's certainly not a created being who didn't used to exist at some point. But he's the one who comes from the Father. He and the Father have always been next to each other, with each other. That's who Jesus is. He's come from the Father. And that you sent me, says Jesus. Maybe that's shorthand for saying that the Father had a plan and a mission.

And I was sent on that mission. I was given a task to do. And that was my work, says Jesus. That's who I am. That's what I came to do. I've been sent on a mission by the Father.

And perhaps that's quite sort of compressed. But I think that's the sense of what it is. So what has Jesus done for these people? He's revealed stuff to them.

[24 : 56] He's given words to them. They've understood. They've come to certain convictions and understandings themselves. They haven't got the wrong end of the stick. They're not dunces and ignoramuses.

They're not making it up off their own back. They've received it from God. And Jesus says, they glorify me. Anybody tell me the verse where it says that?

I am glorified in them. I've got it. Verse 10. All I have is yours. All you have is mine.

And glory has come to me through them. So he's glorified in them. They glorify Jesus. So if I had, I think I was going to write another arrow on there.

But sadly, I'll just have to indicate it. So you see, there's sort of things happening, isn't there? The Father is giving things to the Son. The Son is giving things to this group. And they come to know and receive things and believe things.

[25 : 57] And then they are in a position now to glorify Jesus. That's rather wonderful, isn't it? So that was the question, what has Jesus done for or to these people?

Does that make sense? Really thinks it makes sense. Good. Oh, I did put another arrow. There we are. Right. What does Jesus ask for these people?

What does Jesus ask for these people? Because he is praying for them. Let's notice what he says. So verse 9 now. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me. For they are yours. All I have is yours. And all you have is mine. So he says, I am not praying for the world.

Sometimes Jesus prays for people, other people. But in this particular case, he's focusing his prayer on this group here. And he's praying for them. And it would be interesting to know what he prays for them.

[27 : 03] So verse 9. Verse 9. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world. And verse 15. Verse 15. My prayer is.

Well, it's prayer for them. Not for the world. And he does not pray that they are taken out of the world.

I've got myself out of order again. So let's see what he does pray. In verse 12. He says, while I was with them, I kept them.

Sorry. I protected them and kept them safe by the name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that scripture would be fulfilled.

Verse 13. I am coming to you now. But I say these things while I'm still in the world. So Jesus says, there's some things I won't be able to do because I'm no longer in the world.

[28 : 15] But I have a prayer for them. I will not be present to keep them in your name. Verse 12. But he asks the Father to keep them by the power of your name.

That's in verse 11. Do that again. Verse 11. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world.

And I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them by the power of your name. The name you gave me so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them and kept them safe by that name you gave me.

None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction. So that the scripture would be fulfilled. So Jesus says, not praying for the world. And there's a prayer I'm not praying.

I'm not praying to take them out of the world. But I ask you, Father, to keep them in your name. So it's a prayer for the Father to be at work with this group in a way that Jesus no longer is doing.

[29 : 19] Keep them in your name. Keep them by the power of your name. So the name, again, is not just a set of letters. It is the character, power, purpose of the person concerned.

And he says, Holy Father, will they be kept by your almighty power and in your almighty purposes. You keep these people and guard them.

And he says, they may be one as we are one. It's a puzzling statement, isn't it? What does he mean there? Verse 11.

I remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world. Keep them by the power of your name so that they may be one as we are one. Well, what is that oneness that he refers to?

To keep them in this space here, in this circle. He doesn't ask that they'll be one when they go down to the pub and get drunk.

[30 : 27] I mean, people could be one in doing that. He wants them to be one in the purpose and love and revelation of Jesus Christ.

Because he and his father are one in that. And he says, I want these people to be one in that. So here are my sentences, which I think are a little bit out of order. Keep them in your name that they may be one as we are one.

Not to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. That's what Jesus was praying for these people. And then one other request, which is, I think, somewhat mysterious.

But this is what he says. It's in verse 17. He says, here's a prayer. Sanctify them in the truth.

Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be sanctified in truth.

[31 : 33] So I think this is a bit mysterious, but I'll have a go at it. I think he's saying with this sanctify, set them apart to serve me.

Jesus says this about himself, actually. He says in chapter 10, verse 36. Jesus says in 10:36, what about the one whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world?

Does anybody have sanctified? Does Lindsay have sanctified for that 10:36? Because NIV says set apart and sent into the world.

Oh, right. Consecrated. Thank you. So I think it's quite, it takes a bit of thinking about, doesn't it? I think what Jesus is saying is, I set myself apart for service, for the Lord's plan and mission.

And I pray that you would set them apart for that as well. Set them apart, verse 17. In truth. Your word is truth.

[33 : 08] As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too might be sanctified in truth.

So I think he's saying, here's this group. I'm praying for them to be protected. They've received words.

They've received a revelation of the name. Let them hang on to that. Let them be set apart in this truth so that they can serve me. And keep them there.

Stop them from going off beams. Stop them from going off track. Sanctify them. I've done this myself for their benefit. And you've given them your word.

So by the work of Jesus and by the word of the Father, may they be sanctified. May they be set apart for service. And may they be protected from the evil one.

[34 : 08] So there's the snake. And that bit was, which verse was that? That was verse 15. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one.

So I don't know whether the picture makes it clearer or more complicated. But here's this group of people that Jesus has been working so carefully with. And now he's praying for them.

He's saying, keep them together. Keep them together in this truth that I've given to them. Protect them from the evil one. Who would easily like to swallow them up and make them different to what they're supposed to be.

I'm not praying that you would take them out of the world. Because they've got a job to do in the world. And this is how Jesus prays for them. So let's look at one more thing.

How does Jesus see the future for these people? So from what we've seen, they are still in the world.

[35 : 16] Verse 15. My prayer is not that you would take them out of the world. Verse 12. Verse 12. Keep them safe by the name you gave me.

None of them has been lost except the one doomed to destruction. They're still in the world. It's a risky place to be. It's a threatening place to be. There's the world. There's an evil one that will try and swallow them up and oppose them.

So keep them there. Protect them from the evil one. Protect them by your name, says Jesus. May they continue to be one.

So not one in any old thing, but one in the blessing of being part of the purposes of the Father and the Son.

In that one. And keep them from emigrating back out of that like Judas did. So there's one person who Jesus says, I'm quite conscious that he went out of this apostolic blessing back into the world.

[36 : 24] That was Judas. And he says, as an exception. I never protected him. Don't think that that was my mistake, says Jesus.

That was scripture. Scripture foretold that. His loss was not unplanned.

That's part of the fulfillment of scripture. And I see these people, says Jesus, being set apart for purpose and service like Jesus himself.

And as the Father sent the Son, the Son is going to send those people out into the world. Set apart in the truth for the gospel.

Verse 18. As you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. It's an interesting thing that Jesus prays, isn't it?

[37 : 34] That this group of people would have such an important mission. Would have such a precious knowledge and understanding. And he sends them out into the hostile world.

Armed with this prayer. That they'd be kept. Kept intact. Kept from the evil one. And Jesus sends them off into the world.

So, where does this leave us? Well, we're not the apostles. So, what we've been listening to is not really about us.

It's about them. And you might think it's quite complicated. And I think I agree with you. And you might think it sounds a bit irrelevant. And I'm not sure that it is irrelevant.

Because I don't think Jesus would have wanted us to overhear it. If it was irrelevant. But I think what it is saying is how important this group of people is. And I come back again to the fact that the only way that we can be Christians is by believing their word.

[38 : 37] And the fact that these people have been armed with such a prayer gives us a sure basis for eternal life.

We're not being asked to trust idiots. We're not being asked to trust weirdos.

We're not being asked to trust individuals who have some mad idea. We're being asked to trust people for whom Jesus spent these years equipping them.

Made sure they'd understood it. And prayed effectively that they would have this truth. And as they went out into the world that they would faithfully communicate this truth so that we can believe it.

So what are we believing? Well we're not believing our feelings. The Bible doesn't tell us to look to our feelings. What do you feel is the truth? It doesn't tell us to find random ideas off the television or off the internet.

[39 : 45] Because there's loads of those. He says what is the word of the apostles? What did these guys say?

And if you're wondering what these guys said, don't wonder any longer. Because that's what the Bible is. That's what the New Testament is. It's the words of the apostles in various different ways written down.

But written down so that we would know for sure what this message is. It's God given. It's complete. Jesus says I gave them the words. They received them. I don't have any more to tell them. That's it. It's complete. And the apostles are the place to go. They are the authorised dealer.

They are the people. If you want the genuine thing, you go to them. They're the authorised dealers for the truth of the gospel. And if somebody else says, oh I've got all the truth about the gospel.

[40 : 43] Or I've got the truth about eternal life. You say, show me the maker's mark. Show me that this is apostolic. Just in the way that I looked at my battery for the word Motorola.

I couldn't find it anywhere. So I sent it back. So the truth that we receive, I think we're entitled to say, where does it say apostolic on this? You know, somebody's telling us something.

Say, these are the words of God. We say, okay. Those would be the words of God if the apostles said it. Where are the apostles saying that? You show me that. Otherwise I won't believe it.

Because that's why Jesus equipped these guys for this very thing. They're the people who have the words of eternal life.

Jesus gave them the words to them. And they also are a sort of example of what God will do for us. They're a model of eternal salvation.

[41 : 43] What can we say about these people? They were chosen by God. And that's how, bottom line, that's how people are Christians these days.

If God, in some mysterious way, gave them to Jesus Christ. How does that all work?

Well, it's a complicated question, isn't it? But the truth is simple. If you're a Christian, why am I a Christian? Because God, in some wonderful way, decided that before I even existed.

What did Jesus do for these people? He looked them in the eye and said, I die for you. I go to the cross for you. And that's a model for us. He says the same thing to us. And what did these people have?

They benefited from a work that Jesus finished on his own for them. They didn't contribute to it.

They all left him and ran off. And Jesus says, and that's the same for you.

[42 : 49] If you're Christians, it's because I've done a work for you that you haven't contributed to. I've done the whole thing. I finished it for you. You trust me.

And the apostles enjoyed fellowship with God. There's a joy that Jesus specifically gave them.

And there's a fruitfulness that Jesus promised them. And the promise of him, of them being with him forever.

And he makes the same promises to us. He says, if you abide in my word, you have fellowship with God. If you believe these things, you have joy in your hearts.

If you abide in me, you can be fruitful. And one day, you will see my face and be with me forever.

And one day, you will see my face and be with me forever.

[43 : 56] Well, may God bless us in thinking about that. And being confident of it. And believing it. We're going to sing a song together to close. Thank you.