

John 17:6–19

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[0 : 0 0] Again, the scripture reading for today is taken from John's Gospel, chapter 17, verses 6 to 19. I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world.

Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you, for I have given them words that you gave me, and they have received them, and they have come to know in truth that I came from you.

And they have believed that you sent me. I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.

And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me.

I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

[1 : 0 4] I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.

They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning.

It's great to be with you, and wonderful to see many here today in the loft. What a joy, really, to be in the presence of one another as we have God's word before us.

Let me just open with a quick word of prayer. Our Heavenly Father, I now pray that you would, indeed, forgive me of my sins, hide me behind your cross, that we all might see your Son, our Savior, in whom is our hope, our salvation, our sustenance, our glory, and that as he is elevated, we would live rightly for him until we see him face to face.

[2 : 3 4] In his name we pray, amen. Well, it is not uncommon among Christians when a loved one is standing on the threshold of departing from this world to the next, one who would be moving from here to heaven to call the beloved of that individual around them and to offer prayers.

I've been at bedsides many times where we gather as family and as friends and usher one into the presence of God's eternal kingdom and rest by a prayerful, a bountiful bouquet of prayers for them.

It is much less common to see something develop like what we have in our text today. The one who is going to, in a day's time, be the departed.

The one who is leaving here for heaven, gathering around himself all of those who will be left behind and offering prayers for them.

And that wonderful surprise is before us today. We are now in the second of three weeks on what really could be, should be, might be called the Lord's Prayer.

[4 : 14] And last week he began to offer prayers for himself, but now he has called his nearest and dearest to overhear his prayers for them.

Just take a look at the text, and I encourage you to keep it open, John 17, for what are we meant to overhear from the prayer of Jesus who is soon to be the departed?

And as importantly, why should it matter? Why is this recorded for us? Well, it's clear that Jesus is the one on the threshold of departure.

17.1, he prayed that the hour had come. You can see very clearly in verse 11, he's within the context of saying, I am coming to you.

That same phrase is repeated in verse 13. In the midst of his prayers, I am the one coming to you. And it's equally clear that he's gathered his closest around him, the 11, the disciples, and he's praying here particularly for them.

[5 : 39] It is a limited scope of concern. It's for those disciples who would follow him.

You can see it. They are the select loved ones. Notice verse 6. The ones to whom Jesus had made manifest the word of God given to him out of the world.

They are the ones that the Father loves. They're the ones who had been given, verse 7, to Jesus from the Father.

And then he says in verse 9, I'm praying for them, not the world in general. Not that he's not concerned about the world, but it's almost as if in the midst of his prayer, he's saying, now, Lord, Father, I'm speaking to you now, not of all things in general, but of these that you gave to me, and that who in verse 8 believed in me.

Verse 7 and 8, those who received the word from me. And in contrast, he says, I only lost one.

[6 : 49] That was the son of destruction. In other words, his prayer is for the 11. So here he is, your Lord, in a day's time on the cross, gone, resurrection, ascension.

And he is praying for those nearest to him. What do we overhear? Interestingly, first, what we hear is a prayer for their protection.

That's the imperative in the text. Look at verse 11, the way in which it closes. Holy Father, keep them in your name.

Keep them. In one sense, protect them. You can tell that because he's actually reiterating the definition of that term concerning, I kept them, verse 12.

I guarded them while I was among them. But now that I am going to you, O Lord, Heavenly Father, you protect them. Even the close of verse 15, you'll see the very same idea.

[8 : 05] But that you would keep them from the evil one. This is the Lord's prayer for his disciples. It is a prayer of protection, which really ought then to jog our minds that Jesus considers this world to be a dangerous place without him.

Now, this is something that we don't consider that often. Here he is asking the Lord, Father in heaven, to actively safeguard, to hold these 11 secure.

The same word that is spoken of in John 2 when the good wine had been kept for last. It had been safeguarded.

It had been under watch and only arriving at times where it would be fully useful and beneficial to God's purposes.

This is what he's saying, that it would be kept. But notice, it's not here something you're kept for something. They're kept from something. That's his prayer.

[9 : 23] Not just a prayer of protection and keeping, but that they would be kept from. And what is it? Well, it would be impossible to hear Jeremy's reading today without hearing the repetition of the word world.

I mean, it occurs eight times, even in verses 11 to 16, on this prayer of protection. Protect them from the world.

The world is evidently a dangerous place without Jesus or the protection of the Father. And that's, of course, because right there at the end of verse 15, to be kept from the world is to be kept from the evil one, from the prince of this dark world.

I want to sit on that for a moment. Our need of protection from the world in the sense that the world is a dangerous place without our Jesus.

One writer wrote something that I read this week. He said, it cannot be denied that there is a great distance between our present understanding of the world, our openness to the secular, mainly non-Christian society on one hand, and the attitude of John's first readers toward the world on the other hand.

[10 : 55] See, John's readers, through prayers like this, developed a philosophy of mind, a theology of heart, that the world was something not only dangerous from them, but it was in opposition to the things of their Lord.

And yet for us, the world is something that we embrace all too often indiscriminately.

Let me play this out along two lines for you. I've been thinking this week about prosperity in the world.

I've been thinking about the principles under which the world operates. And I've been thinking about the fact that often these things which are good, the ability to garner good things from the earth and the world to sustain ourselves, often can get manipulated by the prince of the darkness of this air, and they begin to be negatively construed.

C.S. Lewis said in Screwtape Letters, prosperity knits a man to the world. C.S. Lewis said in Screwtape Letters, prosperity knits a man to the world.

[12 : 46] C.S. Lewis said in law, you generally, myself, I'm speaking of my own self-reflection, you begin to protect that which you have.

And yet the world itself, run on its own principles, will often garner wealth at the expense of others, protect wealth from the availability to others.

And when those things occur, all of a sudden you've distorted the provisions that God has given us, and you've manipulated your life in ways that destroy unity.

Notice what it destroys. Notice he says he wants them to be kept so that they may be one even as we are one, verse 11.

Unity within the church is sacrificed when we accommodate ourselves to the principles of the world wherein we benefit without actually realizing that often it is at the cost of others, that some pay a higher price for the benefits that you receive.

[14 : 06] He wants them to be kept from that. Kept from a view of the world that you are to, in a sense, knit yourself to it and then protect all of your assets in light of it.

It's especially true in this day when the church needs to be wrestling rightly with a proper view of wealth, a proper attainment of wealth, a proper pursuit and godly ability to provide from wealth, and yet acknowledging that often wealth is limited in regard to its range or its opportunity.

Just this morning I was reading in the Chicago Tribune front page article, and I was confronted with a statistic there that indicated that white families in this country have 10 times the wealth of non-white families.

It didn't define what a family was. It didn't account for hard work and effort. I'm guessing they're moving all the way back toward generational transference of wealth.

But that's just an interesting statistic, that white families have 10 times the financial capacity that non-white families have.

[15 : 38] And what is to be done about that? Well, I can tell you what's happening as a result of all of this in the present context is it's destroying unity. It's destroying oneness in Christ.

To be a beneficiary of generational wealth, of which I am, without being actively engaged in trying to ensure that it isn't manipulatively drawn or narrowly construed to keep others away, is what actually would make me complicit in.

It isn't the wealth itself. It's the beneficiary nature of unjust advantage, not actively engaged, which then makes one complicit in.

Now, did you catch my words? They were as low as I could get it. Beneficiary, activity, complicit. Those are the ABCs, or literally in the order in which I put them, the ABCs of worldliness that the church must be protected from was an inordinate concern to gather wealth for yourself.

This is in the pastoral epistles, certainly as it relates to pastors and teachers, that they are not to accumulate much for themselves. And what the church could do in the coming hour to safeguard the unity of the body would be to actively think about all the ways we might be able to preserve, as it says in Ephesians, to uphold the bond of peace.

[17 : 28] Bonds of peace are being broken all around us because some within the body of Christ feel that there are too many who are complicit without being active, although they were beneficiaries.

I think the next generation, you know, I'm 59. But when I look to my children's age and my grandchildren's age, this is not so much anymore even a question of race, is it?

It's a question of access to the ability to make your life better in ways that don't feel as though you're continually having been limited on the back of someone else.

And you carry that out over family history, over time and time and time again. It debilitates the heart, breaks down the church, dissolves the unity.

And what we are seeing now is the moment in Ecclesiastes where everybody returns to their own corner, where the trust is destroyed, where it's a time for breaking down, not building up.

[18 : 49] It's a time for tearing apart, not mending. It's a time for isolating, not gathering. It's a time for tearing, it's a time where socioeconomically and racially, the church is headlong into diffusion.

Why? Because we don't always keep ourselves in the love of God. This is his prayer.

As he's leaving, and he knows the world is a dangerous place, I'm telling you that there are implications for us on preserving the unity.

I think of another one, not just prosperity because it's an easy target, but I think of the principles under which the world is presently living.

When Christians indiscriminately embrace the guiding principles of the world, they are not being kept for that which would unify the church.

[20 : 05] So what are the guiding principles of the world? I was just in conversation yesterday with a member of our church and his father, and they reminded me just in a little phrase of the guiding principle of the age is that we are to identify ourselves as we see fit, and that enables us in our personhood to identify ourselves with any others who would so see themselves in their own light.

We are transferring the imago dei to becoming God-like in and of ourselves. The world would tell you that you are free to self-identify as you see fit, to create your own category.

And they're doing it on the issues of gender, so that a man is not a man if he says he is a woman, and a woman is not a woman if she should say she is a man. We're doing it on the issues of sexuality, and I'm not speaking of the culture, I'm speaking of the church generally.

We're doing it on sexuality, that everyone is free to identify as they see fit, to live with, to sleep with, to love whoever they see fit, because as they identify as something, they are then free in Christ to identify with something.

You're seeing it with an unencumbered embrace, not only on issues of gender and sexuality, but an uncritical look at critical race theory, where everything is being destroyed in regard to how we identify ourselves as persons.

[21 : 54] And this is undoing the church. It's the world's principles that reside in the hearts of Christian men and women.

which Jesus is praying that the Father would protect them from. And if the church is not protected from these things, their unity is actually destroyed.

When I think about what's ahead for us then as a church, as a church family, we need real clarity from the scriptures on who we are as men and women. We need a long soak in what it means to be made in the image of God, which would both elevate every other individual in our midst and bring glory and beauty from our midst.

And we also need active engagement to fight against the things that would destroy unity within the body. That's his prayer for protection.

But that's not all. The prayer for protection is followed in verse 17 to 19 with a prayer of consecration. Let me read it to you again.

[23 : 23] The word sanctified there is in one sense to be set apart.

So he's praying not only that they would be protected from the world, but that they would be, in a sense, they would be put aside for the word of truth.

I mean, these are the two ends of the prayer, the two real imperatives in what he's bringing before the Father. He's basically saying, Lord, not only keep them safe, but set them apart.

Not only protect them from, but put them aside for. And what are they putting them aside for? That they would be in the word, in truth.

So as he has prayed, you are to be in the world above, verse 11. They're in the world, but he's praying that they would be protected, verse 14, but they are not to be of the world.

[24 : 29] So too now, he says, and I do pray that they would be in truth, in the word, set apart for that word, consecrated.

Let me see if I can just sit on this for a moment. What does it mean to be consecrated to something? At least in the scriptures. Two things.

Sacrificial animals were set aside to make righteous provision for an ungodly people to be in the presence of God.

So, sacrificial animals were consecrated. They were sanctified. They were set aside. And they were set aside for that particular use.

But not only sacrificial animals, but priests. Individuals were set aside for service. So you have animals being sanctified for sacrifice, priests being set aside for service, and both of those elements are in play in these short verses.

[25 : 40] because Jesus says that they are to be sanctified in truth. Like a priestly service, these eleven are now going to carry God's word before the world.

And, he says, just as verse 19, for their sake I consecrate myself. He sets himself apart as a blood sacrifice through whom we can enter into the presence of God.

And so this is what is to happen. This is what he's praying. Lord, while I'm leaving, put them aside for truth, and your word is truth.

Protected from the world, consecrated in the word. Protected from the world that you would safeguard their unity, consecrated in the word that they might be sent for usefulness.

That's his prayer. And what is the word? What is the word? In John's gospel, there to be set aside for the word.

[27 : 05] chapter 1. The word is launching out of John's understanding. And in chapter 1, he references a moment in the prologue that goes all the way back to Moses wanting to see God's name, to see God's face.

And what he sees is his name. At the time that the people were disobedient in the desert with the golden calf, he hides himself, and God comes through with his name as both gracious and true.

And so the name is both grace and truth. His name. That's what we learn. Jesus is the name.

And the name is graciousness and truthfulness of God to an ungodly people. This is what the Christian message continues to hold.

You must hold a word of grace, but you must speak the truth in love. It is not that we are to be a grace-filled community without truth or a truth-holding community without grace, but to be sanctified in his word, to see him, which no one has seen God, but Jesus makes him known.

[28 : 31] And how does he make him known? Through a word. And what is the word? Well, for Moses we receive the law, but in Jesus we receive grace and truth.

What else is the word? John 3. Jesus will go on and say, you must be born again. This is the word they are set aside for. The necessary act of every man, every woman, every child coming to understand that while you were born a child of God in the sense of we all were made in his image, we are not all children of God.

We are not all right. We need a spiritual rebirth. Chapter 5. What does it mean to be in his name? Well, his name is life.

He has come to give life. Verse 21, for as the father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the son gives life to all he knows.

Chapter 8 and verse 51, he says, truly, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death. This is the word we have been given, that in Jesus, we find real grace, real truth.

[29 : 51] In Jesus, we know we have to be born again. In Jesus, we find him to be the life. In Jesus, we find an eternal life in which we will never die.

In Jesus, we find in chapter 11, the resurrection and the life. In Jesus, we find an adherence to his person, having been consecrated on the cross, that my sins can be forgiven, and I am born anew.

Anew. Brand new. New creation, so that I can live rightly in the world and not be of it. I can think rightly for the first time in my life. I can discern clearly.

I don't have to indiscriminately hold all the principles the world is throwing at me, and I don't have to hold on to all the things the world has given me.

This is his prayer. And notice the mission. The mission is phenomenal to me. The mission, the purpose for consecration, proclamation.

[31 : 02] Your word. Look what he says here at the very close in our passage. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

Hey, Christ Church, Chicago, don't get this wrong. Christian mission is not merely unity. Christian unity is for the purpose of mission.

That's the way his prayer works. Oh, Lord, may they be protected from the world so that they would be one as you and I are one. Oh, Lord, may they be sent out into the world that they might actually give the world something useful.

that is my name. I think there's never been a moment in my own ministry where the church needs more clarity on what is our mission.

The Christian mission is not merely lowest common denominator unity. Our unity is for the purpose of Christian mission.

[32 : 13] And that mission is the proclamation of our Lord. This is what Jesus prayed for. He prayed for the 11.

I would say that this is, if you were here today, I'd say, oh, Lord, pray again. Pray again, oh, Lord. Let me sit in a prayer meeting and close my eyes.

You know how you learn to pray as you hear others pray. That's the way it's been for me. As I close my eyes and I listen to other people praying who have learned the practice of prayer, I myself draw upon their own words and begin to pray.

And this text should do that for us. Oh, that the Father who is holy would keep the church in the name of Christ, the outcome of which would be a recapturing of unity in what is increasingly a fractured Christian world.

Oh, that the Father who is holy would consecrate the church of Christ in his word so that we might again be useful to this world.

[33 : 43] You cannot be useful to the world outside of a clear understanding of bearing witness to his name. well, let me finish.

There are times where when I grew up in a religious family, many of you know that, Christians on both sides looking back, and I still remember times where we'd get ready to leave, you know, and Grandpa Morkin or Grandma Helm, we'd stand in the doorway, and it would be the older ones who were nearer to departure from this world who would gather the remaining ones, and as a young child, I didn't like it all that much, but holding hands in a circle as the one who was nearer departure would pray for those who had years and decades of service yet to give.

that's what Jesus does. And he did it here, and he lives to intercede. I've often wondered, what is he interceding for?

What is he still praying to the Father for us while we're left? left? The world is a dangerous place, but thank God we have a risen Savior who to this day sits at the right hand of the Father, captures the Father's ear, and continually, I believe, prays, Holy Father, keep them, lest all unity within the church be broken down.

we're very near that today. Holy Father, consecrate them, that my word and your word would be made known to the world.

[35 : 55] Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, if you do not do this for the church, then there is no hope for the world, and there is little to hope for in the church.

Where do we go from here? Lord, help us remember that the world is a dangerous place without you.

Lord, renew our minds that we would not bend to the principles of the world, or to the overtures of the evil one. Make Christ's church one, like the Son and the Father are one.

Lord, help many to not give up on a desire to live with one another although our histories are so disparate and different.

Help us not to hold on. Give us the gospel to give forth. Lord, if the world needs you, then you must recapture your bride.

[37 : 28] Holy Father, have mercy. Amen.