

Praying with Jesus — Part 2

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 June 2016

Preacher: Ben Short

[0 : 00] Hello, my name's Ben. It's very nice to see you tonight. I would like to begin with a clarification. That wasn't me playing the guitar tonight.

Dave and I have a common experience. Dave's nodding. I've been called Dave at Regent probably about 15 times this year.

And he's probably been called Ben at least 15 times. Yeah, we look very similar. I have a kind of common look, I think.

It's great to have you with us, Dave. Thank you so much for coming. Thank you so much for being here. Well, hello. It's nice to see you. I have this great privilege of speaking to you about John chapter 17.

One of the key skills of living well is choosing what concerns to focus on. We have many options that are before us in our lives.

[1 : 08] Many things that we can spend our time, energy, efforts, love on. And I think it's important that we think about our priorities. We think about what's important.

John chapter 17 is a prayer that Jesus prayed. Actually, it's the longest prayer that we have recorded in the Bible of Jesus. It's the longest prayer we have recorded of Jesus by far.

The next longest is the Lord's Prayer, which is kind of a teaching. Hebrews 5 says that when Jesus lived, he offered up many prayers and supplications. But we don't have very many of them in the Bible.

Most of them are something like this. This is from John 11. Jesus prayed, Father, I thank you that you heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.

It's very beautiful, but also short. That's the third longest prayer of Jesus in the Bible. He prayed very, very often. And chapter 17 is the only one we have that's long at all.

[2 : 22] And in it, Jesus opens up his heart before the disciples to God and lets us in somehow. It's amazing.

And in it, we see God's concerns. What Jesus thought were priorities. What he thought was important. And I'd like us to listen tonight to him.

Actually, he has about six key ones. And we'll only look at two. So I commend for you to go read that later on your own. But if we want to live well, have spiritual wisdom, we'll make Jesus' concerns our concerns too.

I have two points for us tonight. The first one is access to spiritual truth. And the second one is spreading of truth. From Jesus' prayer, we have two points.

Firstly, the access to spiritual truth. All right, let's go. So my first point is about the access to spiritual truth. And what I mean is, how do we decide what's true spiritually?

[3 : 29] How do we find truth? How do we assess truth? If we have spiritual experiences, how do we decide about that? And there's actually lots of competing models about this.

There's different ways of doing this. So there's kind of Eastern spirituality that kind of looks to nature, looks around at what's out there. There's kind of inner light.

Maybe you've heard inner light. And that's a spirituality that looks inside for truth. And kind of whatever is coming out of me is what's true.

And there's another kind of version of that, which is a very modern one. I'll call it the spiritual buffet. And you kind of lay out all the spiritual teachers and ideas.

And you kind of pick from this one, pick from that one, pick from this one. And you kind of make a patchwork. So you kind of pick from all these teachers and put them together. These are different models for spiritual truth.

[4 : 29] But Jesus gives us a different one. A different model of spiritual truth. And the model is giving and receiving.

So let's open our Bibles to John chapter 17. And I'm going to read from it. Mine's not open there right now. Maybe yours isn't too. John chapter 17, verse 8.

Jesus prayed, For I have given them the words that you gave me. And they have received them. And have come to know in truth that I came from you.

And they have believed that you sent me. Here Jesus gives us a model for spiritual truth. And there's two steps. Jesus gives us God's words.

And we receive them. That's how it works. Jesus gives us. And we receive. Spiritual truth is not made by us.

[5 : 34] It does not come from another source. We have one place to get spiritual truth. And that's the words of Jesus Christ. And the Bible. And Jesus gives us a posture.

And the posture is to be on our knees. With our hands open. Receiving from Jesus. I think in the modern world, this sounds a bit strange.

But we're used to it in other areas. Like science. In science, we're used to the idea of one authority. If I said to you that the sky is purple.

Because I looked inside. And I really felt it to be true. You would say I was crazy. You would say that was a ridiculous thing. Because scientists have empirical evidence.

And they tell us. And we listen to what the scientists tell us. Why is it different in the area of morals and spirituality? Why does each person pick for themselves?

[6 : 37] Verse 6 is amazing. Jesus said, I have manifested your name to the people. When Jesus lived, he showed God to us.

He manifested God's name to us. He was the only one that saw God face to face. And he's the only source of spiritual truth. He is the teacher.

And we are the students. Now, maybe you're sitting there. And you're thinking to yourself. How can Ben say that? As we look around. We see people who have received truth without thinking.

They've closed their minds. And it's not gone to good places. People who don't question truth. And just accept. They've done great damage to the world. They've been a source of hate.

And intolerance. And I'd like to say that's partly true. I'll say yes to that. There have been people in the world. Who rigidly perceive truth.

[7 : 40] And have done damage. And I'm not advocating that we throw our brain away. I'm not advocating that we don't listen to wonderful things like science and arts.

And poetry and things of the world. They have a lot to teach us. We enter into a relationship with God. A thinking one and a wrestling one.

A one where we have feelings and we talk to him. And a one where he listens. But it's also a relationship where God is God. And we are not.

A minister in New York is called Tim Keller. And he gives a great illustration about this. He talks about a movie called The Stepford Wives.

It was a book and a movie in the 70s. And then it was remade in 2004. And in the movie, it's about wives. So there are these husbands. And their wives have been turned into sort of robots that say one phrase over again.

[8 : 41] Yes, dear. So the husbands want basically a slave that serves them. And they've had their brains switched off.

And they just do whatever their husbands want. And their whole existence is there to please their husbands. So the husband says, please do this. And the wife says, yes, dear.

So that's the movie, Stepford Wives. And the point of the movie, I think, is if you have someone that all they do is say, yes, dear.

It's not a real relationship. That's not a real relationship. And if we pick and choose religion, if we pick and choose the spiritual sources that we like, then we have a God who only says, yes, dear.

If we pick and choose, we have a Stepford God. And we don't have a real relationship. That makes us the driver, us the demanding husband.

[9 : 42] One of the deep truths of Christianity is that a relationship with God will shape you. It will challenge you. God needs to bite back.

He needs to be able to say no to us. And if we enter into that relationship, it will be profound. It will shape us. And it will transform us in wonderful ways.

He will say no to us. And we will become like Christ. So there is one source of spiritual truth. Jesus gives God's word. And we receive.

So that's what Jesus prays right at the beginning. And he's so excited. He has given them the words. And they have received them. So my first point was about the access to spiritual truth. My second point is a separate one that comes near the end. And it's about the spreading of spiritual truth. I'm going to read from verse 16. It would be great if you read with me.

[10:45] Read along with me. I'll read out loud. 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 have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. What a wonderful thing Jesus says.

Jesus has made a group of people different to the world somehow. And he has sent them. He has sent them. This is the idea of mission. This is the idea that God has chosen some people.

And given them a job to do. Given them an identity of mission. Now, there are two objections to mission that come right away as soon as I say that.

There's kind of objections to the idea of Christians evangelizing. And maybe we could say there are two. Maybe there are more. At least two. One objection is that the idea of mission is kind of arrogant.

[11:50] It assumes that we have it right and you have it wrong. And it kind of smacks of superiority. So maybe that's one idea of mission. And the other idea, the other objection to mission is that it's scary.

We kind of have a picture of needing huge amounts of courage and walking into situations kind of swallowing our throat with sweaty palms. And I'd like to say that both these conceptions of mission are not very good conceptions of mission.

For different reasons. And I'd like to invite you to reimagine mission. To rethink about it. To think about what mission could be. And I'll begin with a picture.

Here's the picture of the Dead Sea. I've never been there. I've just heard about it and read about it. But it's called the Dead Sea because no living things can survive in it.

There's no fish or plants or anything. And you might know that it's the Dead Sea because of the amount of salt that's in it. Apparently it has 33% salt.

[12:58] That's very high. The normal ocean has about 3%. So it has a high amount of salt. But maybe you don't know why it does have a high amount of salt.

It has that salt, apparently, because it's very low. It's 420 meters below the sea level. It's one of the lowest, maybe the lowest body of water in the world.

And water flows into it. But water cannot flow out of it. There's nowhere else to go. It's the lowest points. And so all this salt water flows into the lake, the Dead Sea.

And the water evaporates. And there's this high concentration of salt. Because the water has nowhere to go, that lake gets poisoned.

Jesus has sent love into our hearts. Jesus uses the picture of a stream of water in the Gospel of John. And if it stays inside of us and doesn't leave us, if it just stays there, it's going to turn poison.

[14:14] Like the salt water of the salt Dead Sea. And so Jesus doesn't let us stay where we are. Verse 18.

As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. We don't do mission because we're better than other people.

We don't do mission because we have to. We do it because God loves us. And he has chosen us. And he has given us a new identity. I'd like to say two things about mission.

Two things that we get out of this text to help us to think about mission. To reimagine it. And it's about sharing our lives and sharing God's Word.

Okay, one. Sharing our lives. Two things about mission. Firstly, sharing our lives. Again, verse 18. Jesus said, I have sent them into the world.

[15:11] And when Jesus says this, there's kind of a sense of permanence about what he says. It's not I'm sending them or I send them to go and come back. He says, I have sent them.

It sounds a little bit like I am a Canadian. Or I am a son. It's actually an identity statement. Jesus has sent us.

I think one of the keys to mission is a sense of permanence. Sort of being in one place with one person. Or in a few places with a few people.

I'm going to use the word presence to describe what I mean. Presence is our time, our attention, our energy. Presence is what we look at.

And don't look away quickly. I think we can view the gospel as a gospel of presence. We have turned our backs on God.

[16:11] And the words became flesh and dwelt with us. Verse 6 says, I have manifested your name. We could say Jesus presented God to us.

The gospel is a gospel of Jesus coming to be with us. And a key part of mission is us being with people. So often the immediate needs of my life crowd out the people around.

I wonder if you find that to be true as well. So often things that are immediate crowd out my ability to have presence with people. My question for us is, Who do you have time to spend with?

Who do you spend your time with? Who do you eat with? Who is God calling you to? It's amazing how often we don't know our neighbors. I think it's hard.

I was talking to a friend of mine called Barry. And we were chatting. He lives just over here, quite close to here. And he was telling me that a few years ago, he knew basically none of his neighbors.

[17:18] He knew a few of their names. But many of the houses around, he didn't know the people who lived in those houses. And he started reading a book. And he's a Christian and was thinking about this idea of kind of neighbors and presence.

And he just kind of made a decision to start being there. And when people were walking to their house trying to say hi, he's thrown a couple of block parties over the last couple of summers.

Now he knows the story of everyone on his block. He knows them all. He's just taken the time to say hi and to be present with them.

I guess I'm advocating for mission partly as sharing your life. And we can only do this with some people. We cannot do it with everyone. All of us have some life.

None of us have more life than we want. We only have a little bit. And so the question is, who will we share our lives with? I'm not advocating a drive-by mission.

[18:22] I think sometimes we thought about mission as kind of going, blessing, and then leaving. That's good. A good thing to do. And it's not events either.

It's not someone gives a talk and we invite our friends to it. I think we all have a life to share and a presence to give. And I think it doesn't have to be complicated.

I think we can just think about who we share our lives with. But the second thing that we share is God's word. We share our lives. We also share God's word.

I heard about a party a little while back. I didn't go to it, but it sounded very cool. It was a birthday party for a girl. And she had a dress code for her birthday party.

And the dress code was all white. Everyone who came to that party wore white. Had as much white as possible.

[19:17] White dress, pants, shirt, shoes, everything to be all white. And everyone came to that party. Everyone's walking around. And then she walked in wearing this amazing hot pink dress.

What a great idea for a party. And everyone looked at her. You could not, right? Everyone's white and there's that hot pink dress.

And you're like, wow, look at that. I have to look at that. I think I want to say that Christians are somehow different. And somehow we should stand out and be distinct.

Verse 14. Jesus says something like this. He says, I have given them your words. And the world has hated them because they are not.

Of the world. Just as I am not of the world. Christians are different because we have God's word. That's what makes us different. Because we've received God's word.

[20:18] And we are not of the world anymore. If we have received that. We stand out like a hot pink dress. Verse 16.

Jesus says it quite a few times. He says, they are not of the world. Just as I am not of the world. I'm sort of worried a little bit about mission. Because I think there's lots of churches who are keen to build community nowadays.

We feel it in this city that we need to build community. And that's a good thing. I'm not against that. But we have more than just to build community. We have to share God's word. And share this distinctive part of who we are.

And if we don't do that, we're not doing mission. Jesus has revealed God to us. What a privilege.

What a privilege. A few weeks ago, the small group that I'm in has started to try and do something

to meet our neighbors.

So we've been putting on a pancake breakfast in a park. We put up tables for two hours and make pancakes. And we have a sign. And we sit there and wait for people to come by.

[21 : 26] It's been kind of fun. And we kind of had a discussion before we did it about what do we say? Hey, you know, someone walks by. What do you say? And so we kind of came up with this line like, we will talk to people and say, well, Ben lives here.

And we're trying to build community. And it ended up being quite kind of weird and awkward because most of the other people didn't live in my house. And whatever girl I was standing next to, the walker by would assume she was living with me.

It was like really awkward. And so people were trying to like talk about things. So we went away and a friend of mine said to me, you should probably use the name Jesus when people ask you who you are.

You should say something about Jesus. So we started doing that. We started saying something very simple like, Ben lives here and we are a group of Jesus followers.

And we are trying to build community. And like that's it. Like not a big line, but we say the name of Jesus. It's been very interesting. Some people have grabbed right away onto it.

[22 : 35] And the very first person I said that to said, Jesus is my prophet. He was a Muslim. And we had a conversation about spirituality. Some people are not into that.

And they just want to move the conversation right on. And that's fine. That's fine. I think we need to learn how to talk about God. And I guess I'd just like to say this.

Are you able to talk about what God has done for you in your life? I think that's the main thing that we're called to do. To think about what God's done for you. To talk about that. Are you able to share your story and how God has met you?

And if you're not, I'd love to talk to you about that. It's a great thing to think about. How do we share our story with God? So I'd just like to end by helping us to imagine together.

To think about it. What could mission be like? Because God has called the church. He has sent the church. The church is a missional community. How can you share God's truth?

[23 : 39] How can you share your life? Who do you share your life with? And who is God calling you to? What things do you already do? That you can invite someone along to? How can you weave other people in?

You see, Jesus ends this section by talking about the power for mission. I'll just read verse 19. For their sake I consecrate myself. That they also may be sanctified in the truth.

See, Jesus has given us ongoing power for mission. It's not our power. It comes from him. His consecration he's talking about is his death on the cross.

He died for us. He was set apart like a sacrifice of the Old Testament. And because he died for us, he has cleaned us. Verse, what verse?

I don't know the verse anymore. Verse 10 he says, I am glorified in them. Jesus isn't glorified in us because of anything that we have done. Jesus is glorified in us because we receive truth from him.

[24 : 53] He has sanctified us. And he ongoingly fills us with power. May God keep us. May God sanctify us again. May Jesus Christ send us out in the power of the Spirit.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.