

Praying with Jesus — Part 2

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[0 : 0 0] Well it would be great if you would take your Bible and open at John 17 on page 903 that was read for us just a moment ago. As you are coming, well if you came to the nine o'clock service this morning, particularly if you came from the northern, the northerly direction, you will have seen thousands of children running in the street. It was not an unusual, well it was a bit of an unusual sight and if you ask the question why, there are all sorts of answers that could be given. Were they running away from their parents as the parents pushed strollers along?

Were they trying to get fit? Is there a bear that has escaped from Grouse Mountain? And then you see the sign that says RBC Run for Kids and you discover it's the largest family fun run in Vancouver, raising funds for child cancer and mental health initiatives and this is called the Miracle Weekend as they feature stories of kids who've been greatly helped and it makes sense and we might want to join in. Well the same is true for the church. You might have come this morning and never been inside a church before. In fact I met some people this morning who hadn't and you might want to know what are we doing and why on earth are we doing it and you can come up with all sorts of answers which I'll let you have fun with. And this prayer of Jesus in John chapter 17 for his people, it gives us Jesus' view of his people, who we are, what we're doing and why we're doing it. And if you trace it through, it's a bit different from what it looks like. But if you trace it through you'll find it really is a miracle and you may want to join as well. So we're in the middle of three weeks looking at this magnificent prayer, the last and longest recorded prayer of Jesus. And it's at the end of the Last Supper and he's about to go out into the dark and be arrested and then tried and then executed and it made a very big impression on John. Am I echoing by the way? Is my microphone echoing? I wonder if you can stop me echoing, Sia. That would be most helpful to everyone present. Excuse me?

It's okay? Okay, I'll keep going then. If it's not clear, just put your hand up. Content as well as sound. Just put your hand up. That'd be very good. It's a dangerous thing to say, isn't it?

It is amazing, I think, when you think about the fact that Jesus is about to die and yet he takes so much time to pray public well, to pray in front of his 11 disciples. And it's full of love and warmth.

And last week when we looked at the first five verses, Jesus prays for himself and the big thing on his mind is glory. And we learn there of the infinite joy of God where before the world and after the world exists, before time and after time, God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit had been pouring glory into each other's hearts, love and grace and taking pleasure in each other. And in Jesus' view as he prays, the supreme revelation of his glory is about to happen in the murderous desecration and humiliation of his death. Because God's glory is so great in that he gives his glory for our sake. And that's what we looked at last week.

[3 : 48] And now today in the midsection from verses 6 to 19, he prays for the 11 and for us. Very important, he's praying for us as well as I'll show in a moment. And he's got two concerns, two main concerns, which for some reason we have a lot of trouble holding together. In fact, throughout the history of Christianity, churches have emphasised one at the expense of the other, but it's pivotal to hold them both together because you can't really have one without the other. And the two things are holiness and mission. What consumes Jesus' prayer for his people as he's about to go and die and then be raised is holiness and mission. The holiness of the church will be different and distinct, and the mission of the church that we live our lives with a sense of purpose and sentience.

And I think we just have to concede right up the front here that both of these things, holiness and mission are despised in our culture today. I mean, the only time we use holiness is when we want to describe someone who is painfully self-righteous and has a holier-than-thou attitude. And mission, use mission in a conversation with non-Christians, it is an absolute conversation stopper. You know, you get imperialism and arrogance in it because it's deeply offensive to our tolerant relativistic worldview. And some churches stress holiness. God has called us out of the world. We need to be different, different, different. We need to set up boundaries and barriers. And churches like that end up looking inwards because they're fearful of contamination. And other churches emphasise mission, mission, mission, sent us, sent us into the world and we better not be too different. And in the end, those churches begin to bend the truth because they're fearful of irrelevance.

And I think the way we need to get to this, the best way to get to this in this passage is to ask the question, what does Jesus pray and why does he pray? So I've got two points longer in the first point. What does Jesus pray? And the answer is essentially the one thing that he prays for in these verses is for our holiness, that we be kept from the world. Now, again, holiness, holiness. If you think of a holy person, you're talking about a guru or a Maharishi. We don't use this language very much. I have heard Christians talk about someone who is a very holy person. What they mean by that is someone who's a bit musty, dusty, churchy, who stayed inside out of the sun too long. That's usually the sort of picture. The word simply means a holy thing is something separated for a very specific use. So in the Old Testament, when God described the building of the temple, he said there are curtains. They're not allowed to be used for anything else but for the temple.

There are barbecue tongs. They're not allowed to be used for anything except they're holy for the sacrifices. There's nothing special about the barbecue tongs except that they're set aside for this specific purpose. In our house, there's a pair of scissors which are holy. And all the boys in the house are not allowed to touch the scissors. They are quilting scissors and they cut fabric and they are holy to that purpose and there are punishments for us using them. If you go to the beach in summer, there are people sitting in these high chairs. They're not just there to enjoy the sun. They're there as lifesavers. They're there for a purpose. They're set aside for that purpose. So when the Bible speaks about God's people as holy, it doesn't mean there's something wonderful about us in ourselves. It simply means that we've been set aside by God for a purpose. Something's happened to us in our connection with Christ which makes a huge change. And that is why Jesus prays for this one thing. He prays for it in three different ways. If you just have a look down into the passage quickly. Verse 11, he prays, keep them in your name. Verse 15, keep them from the evil one. And then in verse 17, sanctify them, make them holy in the truth. There are three ways of praying for the same thing. Sanctify, make them holy, he's saying, your word is truth. Father, make them set aside for a specific thing. Since I am no longer in the world, but I'm coming to you out of the world, please make them holy. Fill their lives with that sense of purpose for them and help them to increase in this sense of set-aside-ness.

And it's so important that Jesus finishes the text by saying in verse 19, that's why I'm dying, that's why I'm going to the cross. For their sake, he said, I consecrate, make myself holy so that they might be made holy in truth. So when he prays, keep, keep and make them holy, he's praying for the same thing. Because keeping has a negative side, keeping from certain things, but the positive side is emphasised, what you're keeping them for. I mean, if you keep chocolate, you're not keeping it for the sake of keeping it. You're keeping it for the sake of eating it, right?

[9 : 21] Well, look at verse 11 again. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you've 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've given me. So while Jesus was on earth, he kept the 11 in the name of God the Father, which the Father had given him.

And that means two things. It means the living encounter. The name of God is his revealed character. And Jesus is saying, I kept them ongoingly in the living connection and encounter with you, God.

But it also means he kept them faithful to the truth. He kept them from error and he kept them from lies. And we have a word in the scriptures which comes from outside our world.

And this word, it calls into questions all the assumptions of our culture. And it says to our culture there that the man dying on the cross is the power and wisdom of God, the source of life and hope, and we will be judged by him.

[10 : 35] And we can only be kept if we are kept in the truth of his word. So Jesus prays that we will be kept in his name for this, that we will know God as he reveals himself in his word, that we be set aside from evil, that we grow in our connection with God.

And I think it's just a lovely prayer for him to pray before he dies. The obvious question to ask is, why do we need so much protecting? I mean, what? Are we really in so much trouble?

Do you notice when we have morning prayer services here every second week, we pray collects before the sermon about God protecting us, guarding us from adversaries and adversities?

We pray for protection all the time. The collect today we ask for God's protection. Do we really need so much protecting? Well, we do.

And the reason is there's one word Jesus uses 13 times in the middle section of this prayer, and it is the word world, world.

[11 : 43] And if you're born after 1946, you're used to seeing photographs of planet Earth, and when we use the word world today, we mean planet, the planet, the world.

That's not what the word meant. Originally, it meant lots of things arranged together, organised together. It was used for men rowing in a ship, that was a world, or a city.

And when the Bible uses it, sometimes the world means the universe, which has been put in order by God and is still beautiful. But in John's Gospel, it is almost always negative. It means humans who are arranged or organised in opposition to God, in rebellion to God.

It's not the same thing as culture or society, because culture and society show the grace of God as well as corruption. The world is humanity rowing against God.

The world is humanity marked by pride and greediness, living as though we are God and there is no God, saying you have no right to tell me what's right and wrong, and especially God has no right to tell me what's right and wrong.

[12 : 55] And I'm going to live my life to get as much as I can, because, well, that's what pleases me. The world is humanity without God in first place.

That's why it makes so much sense of reading John's Gospel. So the world did not recognise Jesus. It does not see the Father. It cannot receive the Spirit. I'm quoting from John's Gospel.

Because in this sense, we are hostile to God. Our lives are bent towards exchanging the glory of God for something else, something that we can control.

But it is exactly this world that God so loved that he gave his only son. You ever thought about that verse? It's not that the world is so fabulous that God loved it.

It's that his love is fabulous. To love the people who are hostile to him. And if you read through John's Gospel, we read that Jesus came to take away the sin of the world.

[13 : 55] That he comes as the saviour of the world. He comes to give his life for the sake of the world. And in his death he overcame the world. So this is how Jesus sees us.

Let's just go back and have a look at this. Look at verse 6 for a moment, please. 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. And then verse 9 again. I'm praying for them. I'm not praying for the world, but for those whom you've given me. For they are yours.

You see, from our perspective, to be a Christian is to trust in Christ, to believe in Christ, to see the face of God when we meet Christ. But from Jesus' perspective, we are a community that has been taken out of the world by God the Father and given to Jesus.

And when the Father gives us to Jesus out of the world, Jesus then gives us the Father's name. He makes the character of God visible, and he connects us to God.

[15 : 10] It's an amazing way of thinking and speaking. In the Old Testament, do you remember that the way God spoke about his people was, he said, you are my treasured possession.

I own everything. But within everything, there is this group, my people. You are my treasured and precious possession, not because you're smarter or better or bigger or longer or nicer, but because I've set my love on you.

And now Jesus in this prayer says, this is who you are. You have been taken out of humanity, rowing against God and given to Jesus.

I wouldn't dare, we wouldn't imagine saying this kind of thing unless Jesus said it so clearly. has massive implications, which we don't have time for. The obvious one is it means that your identity and my identity, who we are, does not come from anything inside us.

Your identity doesn't come from your abilities or your gifts or your achievements. If you've been taken out of the world, our identity comes from outside ourselves. Our true identity comes from God who has chosen us and lifted us up and given us to the person of Jesus.

[16 : 27] And I think that helps explain one of the reasons why Christianity will never be all that popular. Look down at verse 14. I've given them your word and the world has hated them just because they are not of the world just as I am not of the world.

I don't ask that you take them out of the world, but you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world just as I am not of the world. So if you're a Christian believer and you follow Jesus Christ, your very existence and identity is a bit of a threat.

It's a threat to people who are trying to find meaning and identity within this world. You've got a joy and a comfort that's somewhere else. And although Jesus is praying this for the 11, he's also praying it for us as well.

And this is what holiness is. This is simple holiness. He's praying that we be kept as a community taken out of the world. That's his prayer. Secondly then, point two, why?

Why does he pray this? And the simple answer is mission. Let me put it this way. God the Father takes us out of the world so as to send us back into the world.

[17 : 45] So holiness, which is a beautiful thing in itself, here in Jesus' prayer, is for the sake of mission.

Go back to verse 9. I am praying for them. I'm not praying for the world, but for those whom you've given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.

See, why isn't Jesus praying for the world? On the night before he dies. The reason is because he's leaving his disciples in the world. It's through this new community, which no longer belongs to the world, that Jesus is going to be glorified.

It's as this new community grows more and more in its sense of set-aside-ness. It's as we grow in holiness, holding out the word of God to others, that others will see our good works and bring glory to our Father who is in heaven.

Which means we need to be in the world, in the ship that's rowing against God's direction, fully engaged, not withdrawn, in such a way that we're a community of contrast, where our attitudes and our ambitions are formed not like those around us.

[19 : 04] Because this is what Jesus has done. The Father has taken us out of the world, and he's placed us in the world as servants and ambassadors and witnesses and messengers. And in verses 14 and 15, twice Jesus draws a parallel between us and himself, and he says, just as I am not of the world, they are not of the world.

See, Jesus could quite easily take us out of the world, couldn't he? I mean, it would be dramatic, wouldn't it? When someone became a Christian, they'd go out of the world. You would know, wouldn't you, one way or the other.

And I have lots of friends who just wish God would do that. I have a friend who's a little older than me, he just, he is so tired of his own sin, and he wants to go and be with Christ. And it would be great, wouldn't it?

No sin, struggling and suffering. Problem is, Jesus asks us, asks the Father, sorry, not to take us out of the world. But why?

I mean, almost everything we do as Christians, we're going to do better in heaven, aren't we? I mean, we'll love each other, we'll serve each other better, we'll listen to each other, we'll know each other, we'll listen to each other.

[20 : 20] Just thought I'd underline that. No more aching bones, no more sin to forgive, no more arguments about music. That was a joke. There's only one thing, it seems to me, that we can do in this world, and that is to carry forward the mission of Jesus Christ.

So he leaves us here for the sake of others. Which means we are not of the world, just as Jesus is not of the world. And let me quote Bishop Leslie Newbigin.

He says, what that means is that we as the church have a final commitment which is outside the comprehension of the world. Without that radical otherworldliness, the church has no serious business with the world.

Archimedes said, the Greek mathematician, give me a point outside the world for a fulcrum, and I will move the world with a lever. If the church does not rest on a point outside the world, it has no leverage with the world.

All our tugging and straining is but a minor disturbance within the life of the world. This word mission comes from the word sent. The Latin for sent is missio.

[21 : 38] And it's the word Jesus uses throughout this passage and throughout John's gospel. Just as Jesus was sent into the world, so are we. And holiness is for the sake of sentness.

Look at Jesus' logic in the last three verses, please. Just down verse 17, he prays for our holiness in the truth. Verse 19, he speaks of his own holiness and our holiness again.

And then right in between, he says, as you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. You cannot read John's gospel without getting a sense that Jesus is a man on a mission.

His whole life is infused with this sense of purpose. Whenever he speaks about God, he speaks about him, well, not every time, but nearly every time, as the one who sent him.

He says, I did not come of my own accord. God the Father sent me. Whoever does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent me.

[22 : 40] Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my words and believes him who sent me has eternal life. And now he turns around and he sends us into the world to continue his mission.

And why did God the Father send Jesus? It was to bring eternal life to the world. But if you trace through and watch Jesus in the gospel, all the things he does which are small and large are full of joy and full of life and full of holiness.

But he is bending towards serving people and loving people and bringing truth to people. And just a couple of weeks ago, we saw him washing the disciples' feet and saying, this is an example for you to follow.

Here he is just before he dies praying for his friends. That's a terrific example. He engages in the normal things of life. I mean, the first sign he did was at a wedding.

And the great act of service that he's about to do looked like a disaster, looked like a terrible defeat on the cross. So, let me try and bring this down a little bit.

[23 : 48] What that means is that our lives are meant to reflect his. I think a lot of us have this idea that mission is something we do when we're between the ages of 15 and 25, one week a year when we go to Nicaragua.

We go on mission. It's a bit exotic. That is not what Jesus says here. Mission, sentness, is doing all the ordinary things we do with a sense that God has sent us into the world to do them for his glory.

So, shopping. If you're sent by Jesus shopping, you're not just going as a consumer, you're going as an ambassador.

You're not just trying to find the deals. You're going conscious of God and conscious of how you relate to others which will change how you find a parking place.

Or take your leisure. I mean, it's not just exercise or being in nature. It's about worship or work. God has sent you to that place of work.

[25 : 02] It doesn't matter how short a time you are there. You're not there just to make ends meet or just to do something intrinsically worthwhile. You're to serve Christ. You're God's person.

God has sent you there and the people there are for you to love. Your holidays, they're for God's purpose. Your house is for God's purpose. We had a fabulous illustration of that this week.

On Monday night, we had a panel of Christian medics who spoke on the issue of dying well. And they spoke about end-of-life issues and one of the doctors touched on the currently very popular notion of doctor-assisted suicide.

And she said that belonging to Christ means, if you belong to Christ, you have a ministry as you die. And I think that's exactly right.

That is so contrary to the way we naturally think. We naturally assume that my death is about me. But if you belong to Christ, it does not.

[26 : 08] It belongs to him. Same with your schooling or your parenting or your retirement or your finances. To give holiness is for the sake of mission.

There aren't any corners of our lives that are off limits to him. Our identity is that we've been called out of the world and our purpose is to send us back into the world. This is God's plan.

Between the resurrection of Jesus and his coming again to judge the living and the dead, he continues to call people out of the world to send back into the world for his purpose. And I want to finish on this note.

It's worth noting that Jesus actually says in this section why he's saying these things. Verse 13. He says, I'm coming to you and these things I speak in the world that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

See, in the end what generates our identity, what generates activity, what generates holiness and mission is joy. Our lives run towards what gives us joy.

[27 : 17] Otherwise it's just the gruelling, grinding, you know, teeth gritting, I have to be holy, I have to have a sense of purpose. That just doesn't work. What we need is a kind of joy that comes from outside our circumstances, a taste of that joy that's outside the world that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are pouring into each other's hearts all the time.

And the lovely promise of this verse is that Jesus says they will have my joy, my own joy in themselves. The joy that he shares with the Father and the Spirit.

Not measured out in tiny bits but full, fulfilled, richly, overflowingly and thickly. This is what Jesus prays for us.

This is what Jesus wants for us here, Vancouver. We would be holy, that we would be sent and that we would live out of his joy. So let's kneel and pray.

Thank you.