

John 17:6-19

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[0:00] Friends, let's just pray while you're standing. Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this morning.! In Christ's name, amen. Amen. Yes, please be seated. Oh, good morning, everyone.

It's nice to see you all. If you don't know me, my name is Aaron. I'm one of the ministers on staff. We're looking at John 17, 6 to 19.

It'd be good to have your Bibles open. As a reminder, this is the night before Jesus is crucified, and he's with his people, and he spent a lot of time teaching them.

And then the last thing he does is he takes some time to pray for them, and we get to listen in on that prayer. And it's a remarkable thing, isn't it? Here in John 17, we have one member of the Trinity speaking to another member of the Trinity.

We have God speaking to God, and I just want to acknowledge that that's a wild thing, isn't it? And we're not going to wrap our heads around that, but that's okay.

[1:08] This is not a problem that we have to solve. It's just a thing to be kind of an awe of. Now, let me give you a reminder as well of the structure of this prayer.

You heard Jordan preach last week on verses 1 to 5, and it was Jesus praying for himself. And this week, we're looking at 6 to 19, which is like the next section of the prayer.

It's Jesus prays for the disciples. And the following week, Ben Roberts is going to pray the last, is going to teach the last section of this prayer, which is verses 20 to 26, where a lot of it's about the unity of the church.

Jesus prays for unity in the church. But let's get to the task at hand. And we're at verses 6 to 19.

Jesus prays for his disciples. Now, you've heard it read. It's very dense, isn't it?

It's a very dense prayer. It's a theological goldmine. There is so much to it. It's so rich. But it is dense. And I just want to say, don't feel bad if, as you heard it read, you're thinking, I don't really get it.

[2:14] I don't really sort of understand what's going on. That's okay. Let me tell you what I'm going to do, is I'm actually not going to preach the whole thing. I think there's too much here for one sermon.

What I'm going to do, is I'm just going to focus on the two main petitions of the prayer. The two main petitions of the prayer. And here's what I mean. So in prayer, we do a number of things, don't we, when we're praying.

We proclaim things. In prayer, we might say, God, you are awesome. We thank God for things.

Thank you, Jesus, for this church. We may lament.

We might repent. Forgive me, God. We may also request things. We ask for things. In other words, we make petitions. For example, we may pray, God, help me be more patient with my colleagues at work who I find really annoying, for example.

Right? Just an example. It's just an example. Just an example. It might not even be you I find annoying. Right?

[3:21] It could be anyone. It could be anyone. It's a big staff. But again, it's just an example. So, in this section of the prayer, Jesus prays about a lot of things, but he actually only makes two requests of the Father.

He makes just two petitions. And today, that's all I'm going to talk about. It's just the two petitions. Because they reveal to us Jesus' priorities. And in both cases, the requests, the petitions, are for the disciples.

Because remember, in a couple of hours, their world is going to come crashing down. They're going to have a really tough time. So, what does Jesus ask the Father for the disciples?

What are Jesus' priorities for them in prayer the night before he is put on a cross? And here are the two petitions. Jesus prays, Holy Father, keep them.

Keep them. And, the second petition is, sanctify them. So, just two petitions. One, keep them. And one, sanctify them.

[4:30] So, let's get into it. One at a time. The first one, is keep them. So, let me remind you of the passage here. So, this is verse 11, 12, and 15. It talks about this. verse 11, Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

Now, that oneness part, I'm not going to talk about, because that's going to be talked about a lot next week. Verse 12, while they are with him, I kept them in your name. I do not ask, this is verse 15, I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but you keep them from the evil one.

So, let's keep this very simple, okay? Jesus is praying, keep them. What does that mean though? What does keep even mean? What's he, what's he exactly asking? You may already know this, but, a keep, is a part of a castle.

Part of a medieval castle. So, in a castle, there was the outer wall, and all the other stuff, and then right, right in the middle, there was the keep, which was the inner tower. And that was, the keep was the strongest, and the most secure place, in the castle.

It's where all the most valuable things were kept, was always protected by soldiers, and if enemies attacked, people retreated to the keep, for safety. So, that's a noun, and it's, we use it as a verb though as well.

[5:47] So, keep is the English translation, of a Greek word. And it's a great translation, because the Greek word, which is what the New Testament was written, the word keep there, it actually means to guard, and to protect, and to watch over, very carefully, which is what Jesus, is asking the father to do, for the disciples, for us.

He's praying that the father, would guard, and protect, and watch over, his disciples. Now, let's dig, a little deeper here. Protect, and keep, from what?

Or who? I think that's the natural question. And in the passage, it mentions two things, that we need protection from. Two things. One of those things, is the world.

In the prayer, the word, world, is mentioned a lot, 14 times actually, so it's on its mind. And it's a very popular word, in John's gospel. And whenever, the gospel talks about, the world, the world, it's used almost, always negatively.

Now, what does that mean? It's not talking about, the physical earth. The physical earth is lovely. It's talking about, the world, it's talking about, humanity, and it's fallen state.

[7:03] It's talking about, a people, who resist God. which is why, a number of times, in the passage, Jesus says, I'm not of the world.

I'm not part of that system. And then in verse 16, he says, to the disciples, I want you to be, in there, but not, not part of that, worldly system.

In verse 14, Jesus says, the world, will hate you, because of that. And we talked about this, a few weeks ago, didn't we? If you're a follower of Jesus, some people are going to think, you're a bit suspect.

And that can be exhausting. Exhausting in the sense that, it's hard to be, it's hard to, it's hard to be on the outside, of the cultural narratives. It's hard to be different. If you're a parent, you're trying to, you might be navigating school systems, thinking about, oh, what are my kids learning?

You might navigate conversations, where you have quite a different opinion, from the popular opinion, in your workplace, or in your school place. And you're asking yourself, do I say something? If I say something, will people think I'm a weirdo?

[8:10] It can be tiring. It can feel like a battle. It can feel exhausting, and there's temptation in there, to stop fighting, and just capitulate. And of course, there's another temptation, in all this as well.

It's tempting to look at the world, and say, oh man, they're having a lot more fun, than I am. I'm feeling a bit constrained, and we can begin to love, what the world loves.

And you can, you know, pick your thing, sex, money, power, whatever it is, and that can shipwreck your faith. And Jesus says, Father, would you protect my friends, would you protect my people, from capitulating, to the world?

Have you ever heard of a guy, in the Bible called Demas? Demas? You probably haven't. Demas. Demas?

Demas? D-E-M-A-S. It's very obscure. It's in the New Testament. It's only mentioned three times, in three different books, one verse each time.

[9:18] But it tells a story. Let's hear the story of Demas, in three verses. Colossians 4, as he repeats, once, verse 14, Luke, the beloved physician, greets you, as does Demas.

So what do we know? He's just a guy, who's somehow connected to the church. That's all we've got. Philemon, verse 23, Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so does Mark, and Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

So, what else we got here? Well, he's moving in some, he's hanging out with some heavy hitters there, isn't he? He's like clearly in with Paul. He's in the inner circle there.

He's doing some great stuff. Finally, the last time we hear about him, to Timothy 4, Paul writes, do your best to come to me soon, for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me, and gone to Thessalonica.

Well, it's a sad story, isn't it? There are real temptations in the world, and it's tempting to give up, because it's hard living differently. It's hard to be sent out into the world, as a follower of Christ, knowing that some people are going to think you're a bit suspect, a bit dodgy, a bit sketchy, a bit out of step, on the wrong side of history.

[10:42] And given all that, it was a real priority for Jesus, to pray for our protection, that God would keep us. So, we've been talking about the world.

That's one of the things we need protecting from. One foe. But there's another enemy that's mentioned here. Another thing that we need protected from. And the other enemy is the devil. Verse 15, I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. Now, I know, I know, you're thinking, look, I can probably wrap my head around the idea of God, but, the devil, wow, it just, just sounds a bit like fantasy.

That's kind of like, that's kind of a bit nutty, to even think that something like that exists. Some of you may be thinking that. Let's talk, sort of, big picture for a moment, about the evil one, as he's described by Jesus.

Let's go big picture. So, the Bible presents Satan, as a real being. A real being, not, not just a symbol of evil. And it's really important that we note that, Jesus treated the devil as real.

[12:04] So, as Christians, we need to take this quite seriously. And I think as modern Christians, we make two mistakes when it comes to the devil. It's this, either disbelieving in the devil, and think it's, evil is just a psychological thing, or it's just a social thing, or, over obsessing.

You know, the devil is behind every bad thing. I think the Bible avoids these extremes, as we should too. So again, we're just talking about big picture here. What do we need protection from, as far as the devil goes?

What's, what's going to be, what's the devil going to be throwing at us? Well, the devil's main work is deception. It's deception. It's not like, you know, Satan's not going to jump out of your closet, and try and scratch your eyes out, and something like that.

It's far more subtle. He's going to lie. He will lie to you, and he will accuse you. His basic strategy is to get you to believe lies about God, and lies about yourself, and lies about what will truly satisfy you.

And I've hinted at this before, but the lie is, you know, you'd be far more liberated, and far more happy, and far more fulfilled, if you could just put Jesus aside, and kind of just do the stuff that you want to do.

[13:19] You know, if you didn't have to be so generous, man, you could do some other stuff with that money, couldn't you? If I could do whatever I wanted sexually, for example, man, that would be a bit more fun, wouldn't it?

I mean, these are powerful lies, aren't they? Or another lie is, you know, God doesn't completely forgive you. Like, he'll forgive you for getting angry at that driver, like I did the other day. You know, he'll forgive that, but, you know, the other thing he's thinking about, oh, that's probably a bit too big. He can't forgive that. Or the lie that when you die, you're not 100% secure. It could go either way. You could be in a lot of trouble. That's a powerful lie, isn't it? That'll shake your foundations. He tells lies, and he accuses.

For example, I was just, oh, we were just talking about this, Chris, the other day. We were saying, you know, we're talking about the accusations that we feel sometimes, that are kind of, they just come of us psychically, they just come into our brains.

[14:32] And one I have is, in my job, there are things I'm good at, there are things I'm not so good at. The devil loves to remind me of the things I'm not good at. And make sure that those things are the things I'm thinking about a lot.

And that can really suck the life out of your life. Now, the Bible does teach us that Satan is a defeated enemy because of Christ's work on the cross.

So we don't fear Satan excessively, but we take him seriously. In 1 Peter 5, 8, it says, be sober minded. Be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

So in summary, you know, Satan doesn't work in our lives cartoonishly or dramatically. It's often through false narratives about God and yourself.

And so when Peter says, be sober minded, it just means learn to recognize these narratives. Learn to recognize when you're being lied to. And Jesus prays, protect us from this evil one.

[15:39] Okay. So where are we in the sermon right now? Here's where we're at. Jesus is praying. He says some amazing things, but he only makes two requests.

And the first request is keep them. Keep my friends, he prays, protect them, protect them from the temptations of the world and the lies of the enemy. And folks, this is a real priority for Jesus. It's the only two things he actually asks. He prays in the night before he dies. He prays for our protection. And if you actually look at our colloqs and our liturgy, there's a lot of protection language in there already.

Here's my question. Is it something that you pray? I'd encourage you to pray along these lines. God, keep my family, keep my church, protect my friends.

And these last few weeks studying this passage, I've started to do that a lot more. And I'd encourage you to do that as well. Now, at the start of the sermon, I said, there are two requests. We've only talked about one of them.

[16:39] The second request, Jesus made of the father, is what I want to talk about right now. And just for a, just a really short time. The second request is sanctify them.

And I'll deal with this quite quickly. Here are the verses, verses 17 to 19. 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. Greek word, same word, sanctify. I consecrate myself, that they all may be sanctified in truth. So, he's saying, sanctify them, sanctify them, sanctify them.

Again, starting really simple. What does that even mean? Sanctify them. It means to be set apart. You know, the translation would be, make holy.

Consecrate. You know, back in the days, there was lots of holy things. You know, the priests would make these big meals after the sacrifices, after the offerings, and they'd have holy tongs, and they'd have holy boxes, and their robes were holy, and there were holy days.

[17:41] You sort of know this stuff. There's nothing like intrinsically magical about these things. They were just things that were set apart for a specific purpose. They were sanctified things.

I know when we hear the word sanctification, we're probably thinking moral improvement, right? Thinking like sanctifying means making us better and better and better. Does the Bible talk about that? Yes, that's part of it.

But mostly, it means being set apart by God for a specific purpose, for God's work. So Jesus prays, my friends, set them apart.

Set them apart for your purposes. See, God wants us to be ambassadors for him in the world. Set apart for that purpose.

Now, how does this happen? How do we set people apart? How do we become, you know, like a holy people, surrounded by temptations, and a great enemy? What ignites this holiness?

[18:39] What causes people to change careers? What causes people to give up their time, and their money, and resources? What causes people to turn up to church, to go to small groups, to do all of these things?

Because this setting apartness, it needs oxygen, it needs fuel, it needs impetus. And verse 17 and 19 tells us the fuel. It says, sanctify us in truth.

Your word is truth. It's talking about the word of God. Jesus says in the passage, you gave me words. I gave those words to them.

They're going to pass them on. The words of God. I have words. You know, I have words.

You've heard me say words, Chris, in the office, right? I say words. They're fine. I mean, they're average. They're average words. They're normal people words.

[19:35] They're not powerful. I'll give you an example. Well, twice last year, my kids asked for a cat. Twice. They would weep about this.

They would cry, Father, Father, please, all I want in life is a cat. Like a kitten. Please, Dad, let us have a cat.

And they got really organized about this. I sat through two half hour long PowerPoint presentations. Six months apart about the benefits of having a cat.

And twice, I said, absolutely no. A hundred percent no. This is my, children, this is my word, my final word on this.

By the power vested in me by the province of British Columbia. A hundred percent hard no. I said, kids, I just don't want to be responsible for another living thing in my life, basically.

[20:40] You know what I mean? Anyway, if you came to my house today, do you know what you would find? Two cats.

You'd find, you'd find two cats. I don't even know how this happened. I said no.

And then, literally within days, the kids started walking in with cat paraphernalia. Like, I remember sitting on the couch. At that point, I'd had a nice day.

And my daughter walks in carrying a cat bed. And I'm like, what are you, I don't understand. I don't understand why you have a cat bed. What is, why is there kitty litter all of a sudden in our house?

And then at one point, like a couple weeks after the PowerPoint, my wife says, okay, we've got to clean the house. The cat is coming. And I'm like, what? I said no. This happened twice. The cat's names are Keely, is the big one, and the kitten is called Asteroid Destroyer, which is their name.

[21:47] I don't understand anything. Okay, what's my point? I can't quite remember my point. But it's probably something along the lines of, I've just, I just have man words that are a bit useless, that don't do a whole lot.

And my words are not like God's words, right? You know, the Bible is not, if you're new to this whole thing, the Bible is not just a record of like, some other interesting words.

My words can't accomplish much. I can't keep cats out of my house, you know. God's words, God's words can change your life. They can give you a vision for holiness. They can transform your life.

This is why we preach the Bible here, you know.

This is why these sermons are not just a series of kind of loosely connected personal anecdotes, you know. This is why we harp on about going to Bible studies. Jeremiah 23 is greater than this. Jeremiah 23 says that God's word is like fire, is like a hammer that breaks rocks into pieces. You know, Jesus wants you to be in the world, but different.

[22:52] How is that going to happen? And it can only happen if you're feeding your soul with a story that is different to the story that the world is telling you. The devil is going to whisper in your ear, how do you know that's a lie?

You know it's a lie when you know the truth. Let me conclude here. I'm going to finish up here.

What's the really big encouragement, the obvious encouragement in this passage?

The obvious encouragement is that isn't it good to know Jesus is praying for you? Jesus is praying for you. He says explicitly, first time, I'm praying for you.

And he's still praying for us. Romans 8 says that Christ is interceding for us. And what is he praying? He's praying that God, the Father, who takes us out of the world spiritually, is going to send us back into the world.

And what a privilege that is. And Jesus prays, I know that's going to be hard, Father, for them. So protect my people. I read this week this great line. It says, prayer is not an intercom to a butler.

[23:56] Prayer is not an intercom to a butler. It's a wartime walkie-talkie. Prayer is not to pad your life with more comfort. It's to give you the power to do hard things, to give you the power to do difficult things.

And this is what Jesus is praying about, the power to do the difficult thing of being an ambassador for Christ in a world that may hate you when there is a real enemy that actually really hates you all of the time.

And I'll add this before I finish. Look, we're a big church. We have visitors all the time. And not everyone here is a Christian. And if you are here and you are not a Christian, I don't know what you think about everything I just said.

Some of it was quite heavy, I know. You know, I didn't grow up in a Christian home. People always presume that. I didn't grow up in a Christian home. I became a Christian as a young man. I made a decision to follow Jesus.

And how it happened was quite simple. Somebody just explained it to me. And I thought, man, that just makes sense of the world I see. That makes sense of the world I've experienced.

[25:09] Because I knew there was evil in the world. That's no mystery. I knew there was evil in the world. And Jesus just says, there's an intelligence behind that. And I think of a time I was starting to realise I'm not, I don't think I can buy into what the world's offering either.

And what the world is offering is just, you get one life, maximise your happiness, and that's it. And if something goes wrong, well, you're hooped.

You've blown it. Like, is that it? Is that all there is? Jesus. And I also knew in my heart there was something wrong in my heart. There was something off in here.

There was a shame, there was a wrongness that I couldn't do anything about. And Jesus says, I will defeat evil. And Jesus says, I will give you a new way to live.

And I will give you something to live for. And he says, I will forgive you, I will deal with that shame, and I will heal your heart. And I just thought, man, that is an irresistible offer, isn't it?

[26:11] And I still think it's an irresistible offer. So if you were here and you're a sceptic, but a curious sceptic, and you're still thinking about this stuff, I want to extend that irresistible offer to you.

This is all true, what I've been talking about. And it will change your life. Jesus will change your life if you give him a chance. So I would urge you, don't just keep thinking about it.

Make a decision to follow Jesus and do it soon. And that simply means coming to him in prayer.

Jesus, I believe you died on a cross for me.

Forgive me. And I want to live my life for you. And it sounds quite terrifying, and it requires quite a bit of humility to do that. but I promise you, you will not forget that.

And you will not regret that. So, if you want to talk more about that, come and chat to me, come and chat to Chris, or chat to a Christian that you trust.

[27:19] Amen. Amen. Amen.