

His Prayer

John 17

(verses 6-20)

1. Saved

A Disciple is:

- God - Given to Jesus
- Glorifying to Jesus
- Going Out for Jesus

2. Shielded

3. Sanctified

love.learn.live.

westvalleychurch.com



West Valley Church
Michael O'Neill
3/18/18

His Prayer¹ John 17 (verses 6-20)

Thank you Pastor Dan for reading the Scripture passage for us today. We are in the third of a four-part series today called "His Prayer," looking at John 17. The entire chapter records Jesus' prayer. It's often called "The High Priestly Prayer," because Jesus, our high priest, is praying for himself, and his disciples, and us.

What's interesting is that Jesus prayed this prayer *in front of* his disciples because he *intended* for them (and us) to overhear what he was praying about. In this prayer, Jesus is praying, declaring, modeling, and teaching – all at the same time, all in one prayer.

This sermon series is also a timely journey for us to take as we prepare for Easter, because the Gospel writer, John, records this prayer as the last actual thing that happened before Jesus was arrested, tortured, crucified, killed, buried, and then rose from the dead. In every way, this is an important prayer for us to pay attention to, to learn from, and to let change our lives.

Let me just quickly review where we've been: we started out this series by seeing the definition of "Eternal Life" from verse three of this prayer. We saw that Jesus was describing eternal life that he has made available to us; that it is not so much about duration of life, because everyone lives forever – it's just a question of *where* we will live forever, right? The eternal life that Jesus came to give us is about *God's life in us* – a God-quality life that fills every moment of our time on earth, and then only gets better in heaven. All we need to do is accept it. So we prayed to live into that God-quality life, and we prayed for those we know who do not have it, that they would.

Last week we learned that the Father and the Son's glory is found in his suffering, and that he is a God who does not cause our suffering, nor does he always deliver us from our suffering, but neither does he abandon us in our suffering. Instead, God-quality life means we have his presence with us *through* suffering, that he will be glorified as we obey him while we suffer, and that he will work it out in our life for our good when we love him and are called according to his purposes. We closed our service by praying for our ability to find God in our suffering, and praying for those

¹ Resources: William Greathouse, "Beacon Bible Commentary: Vol. 8." Kenneth Chafin, "The Communicator's Commentary." William Barclay, "Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of John, Part One." John Barry, "Faithlife Study Bible." Joseph Dongell, *John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1997) D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus: An Evangelical Exposition of John 14-17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1980)

who suffer without the hope of God, that they might know him and find hope in their own suffering.

We learned all of that from the first five verses of this prayer. In those first five verses, Jesus prayed for himself. Now, in these next fifteen verses, Jesus prays for his disciples, which in turn means he is praying this for us, too.

By the way, Jesus is *still* praying for us. The Bible tells us:

“Therefore (Jesus) is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because *he always lives to intercede for them.*” (Hebrews 7:25, *niv italics added*)

In other words, Jesus is constantly, still to this moment, praying for us. That’s what he lives for, because he wants us all to be saved, to have God-quality life, to glorify God even through our suffering, and to be his disciples in the world, introducing others to him. We’ll see that in this portion of his prayer that we are looking at today.

There are some important affirmations, challenges, and takeaways for us in this passage that should give us courage as we follow Christ and take up our call in this world. But before we can get to that, first we need to set the stage with some valuable truth that is found in this passage that will give us a context for the prayer.

That passage that Dan read to us starts out with this verse:

“I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.” (John 17:6, *niv*)

That phrase, “I have revealed you...” Means literally, “I have revealed *your name.*” This is really important to see what Jesus means by that.

First, it was well-known throughout the Old Testament time and into Jesus’ day that a person’s name wasn’t just the name that you called a person; it revealed their character or their nature. So, for instance, the Psalmist wrote:

“Those who know your name trust in you.” (Psalm 9:10, *niv*)

In other words, those who know God’s character and nature can trust him because they know what he is like. (By the way, there is that word “know” that we talked about last week.)

So when Jesus is saying, “I have revealed your name...,” he is saying, “I’ve allowed people to see what the real nature of God is like.” In fact, Jesus said a similar thing when he said:

“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9, *niv*)

But there is something else going on here, too, which is incredibly cool. During Jesus’ time, when Jews would talk about the “name of God” they meant the sacred four-letter symbol, which in English we write, **YHWH**, - just four letters in English and in Hebrew it looks like this: יהוה This is the representation of the name that God gave himself when “Moses said to God, ‘Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to

them, “The God of your fathers has sent me to you,” and they ask me, “What is his name?” Then what shall I tell them?”

God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites:

“I am has sent me to you.” (Exodus 3:13-14, niv)

When God said, “I am who I am,” that is the sacred name of God, which we translate as YHWH. It’s called the “tetragrammaton.” Sounds like the name of a Transformer! It is a theological/linguistic word used to refer to the name “YHWH” without having to say the name. That name was considered to be so sacred that it was never pronounced audibly, except by the high priest one time each year when he went into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. At the time that God told Moses his name, the Hebrew alphabet did not have vowels in it, and that’s why it is only four consonants. When vowels were created later, the name was still considered so holy that they would put the vowels *underneath* of it whenever they wrote the letters. And they would never write it, except in the Scriptures, because the piece of paper or parchment that it was written on wasn’t holy enough to hold it, and the paper could decompose, or worse yet be thrown on the ground, stepped on, or destroyed. So they would use alternative names as a substitute. In your Bible, when you read the Old Testament and you see the word “LORD” in all capital letters, that is so that you will know that the tetragrammaton, or “YHWH” is being used.

So in the time of Jesus, the name of God was so sacred that ordinary people were not allowed to even *know* it, let alone speak it. God was the remote, invisible King, far too holy for anyone to approach, or know, or even speak his name. But then Jesus prays and says, “I have made your name known to them...”

Here’s what Jesus is saying: “Not only do you know what God is really like, I’ve told you his name. You can now speak the name which is so sacred, because of what I have done and will do through my death and resurrection. I have brought the remote, invisible God so close that even the simplest person can speak to him and take his name on their lips.” Jesus made the inaccessible God accessible and personal. That is why Jesus insisted on referring to God as “Father.” The Jews would also refer to God as “Father,” but the word they used meant “Great Patriarch, Creator.” Jesus used that name “Abba,” which means, “Daddy.” So when Jesus prayed, “I have made your name known to them,” He was declaring this incredible, powerful truth: that God is available and accessible to everyone and is a loving Father!

So with that incredible, powerful truth understood, let’s see what Jesus prays for his disciples. You do know (right?), that what Jesus prayed for his disciples includes you, if you are a disciple of Jesus? So this prayer is for you, too. And the first thing that Jesus prays about is that he acknowledges that they are...

1. ***Saved***

Jesus acknowledged that the disciples for whom he prayed were saved from sin, that they were followers of his, that they were his disciples.

In his prayer, we learn some things about what it means to be Christians. The first is that they were

- **God-Given to Jesus**

Jesus said that God gave them to him out of the world. So you might wonder what that means. Well, let me first tell you what it doesn't mean: it doesn't mean that God determines in advance who gets saved and who doesn't. What it does mean is that God's Spirit went out, reaching out to their hearts, and they responded; God presented them to Jesus. God gave to Jesus the ones who responded. Jesus gives the call, or the Gospel message, to everyone, and the Spirit moves our hearts to respond to hear that call, and empowers our decision to accept that call.

The next thing that we learn about a disciple from Jesus' prayer is that the disciple is

- **Glorifying to Jesus**

Last week we saw how the Father glorifies the Son and the Son glorifies the Father. Now Jesus says that his disciples bring glory to him. We glorify Jesus in the same way that a person who receives a successful heart transplant brings glory to the surgeon, or like a straight-A student brings glory to her teacher, or a gold medal athlete brings glory to her trainer. Because Jesus transforms our lives and puts us on a new path and gives us a new nature and new priorities, our lives bring glory to Jesus.

When Jesus prays for his disciples, there is another thing that he says being saved means, or being a disciple means. It means it is someone who is

- **Going Out for Jesus**

In this prayer, Jesus is making it clear that those who are saved, who are Christian, are men and women who have been commissioned to a task; they have a work to do. Just as God sent out Jesus, now Jesus sends out his disciples into the world to declare and advance the Kingdom of God.

Jesus says something that might be confusing: he said, "I pray for them. I am not praying for the world..." in verse nine. That might seem contradictory. Didn't Jesus come because God so loved the world (John 3:16)? So why did Jesus say he was not going to pray for the world? Let me explain that: when it says that God loves the world, the word that is used means that God loves all the people in the world. When Jesus said, "I do not pray for the world," the word he used was a different word that meant the human structures and systems and society that organizes itself without God and often against God. God loves people, but God does *not* love the systems and structures that either feed people's lust and greed and/or keeps people oppressed and marginalized.

What Jesus does for the world is send his disciples out into the world, in order to bring the Kingdom of God into the kingdoms of men and women, in order to lead men and women to God. So Jesus' disciples are saved in order to accomplish God's love in the world, not simply to be preserved from the world until they get to heaven. Make sense?

There is a video I'd like to share with you about this very thing. I shared this with our small group a couple of weeks ago, and they encouraged me to share it with you, too. This is a description of what it means that Jesus died for us to bring the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth. Watch this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fzy9zMR5J7w>

Does that help? This is something that is evident in Jesus' prayer from the beginning; that eternal life is about a God-quality of life here on earth, that extends on into heaven. But that presence of God is in us, even in our struggles and pain, so that in everything we go through, and everywhere we go, and in every relationship we have, we can bring the Kingdom of Heaven into it. That's what a disciple does – God-given, glorifying Jesus and going out for the Kingdom of God. You do that by loving people and telling them about this Good News.

And you don't have to be afraid to go tell others about Jesus, because Jesus prays that as you do this, you will be...

2. *Shielded*

The point of being saved is not about going to heaven; heaven is a *result* of being saved – but that's not our purpose. Our purpose is to bring the Kingdom of heaven here on earth. If the point of being saved was just to go to heaven, we'd go to heaven the moment we're saved, right? Why stick around? Instead, Jesus prayed, asking the Father not to remove us *from* the world but to protect us *in* the world. Jesus prayed:

“Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one ... I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.” (John 17:11, 14-15, niv)

We are saved not to preserve ourselves but so that we would advance the kingdom. Do you realize what that means? That means you are immortal. Yes, you will live forever in heaven. But that also means that when you are advancing the Kingdom of God here on earth, you will not die before your time. You are protected! You do not have to be afraid!

The Bible says:

“For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.” (1 Timothy 1:7-8, niv)

Do you see that? We don't have to be afraid because in the power of God's Spirit we can tell other people about Jesus, even in the midst of suffering!

Christianity was never meant to withdraw a person *from* life, but to better equip a person *for* life. It doesn't offer us a release from problems, but a way through them that makes us stronger and glorifies God. It doesn't offer us an easy peace, but a

victorious warfare!² We are shielded from evil. Jesus' prayer reminds us that we have nothing to be afraid of!

Finally, Jesus prayed for his disciples and for us, that we would be...

3. *Sanctified*

In this prayer, Jesus prayed for the disciples, including us:

“Sanctify them by 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 truly sanctified.” (John 17:17-19, niv)

Now this might seem confusing, but we need to understand it, because it is talking about you, if you are a believer in Jesus. It is both what Jesus expects of you and has made available to you, so it is vital you know it and experience it if you are going to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

So what does this mean when Jesus prays that you and I are “sanctified”? Well the word that Jesus uses means, “consecrate, dedicate, sanctify, treat as holy, reverence, purify.”

So first, it means to be set apart for a special task. For example, when God called Jeremiah the prophet, he told him:

“I knew you before you were formed within your mother’s womb; before you were born I sanctified you and appointed you as my spokesman to the world.” (Jeremiah 1:5, tlb)

God had a specific purpose in mind for Jeremiah to accomplish, even before he was born. Also, when God was establishing the priesthood for the Old Testament Temple, he told Moses to “ordain” the sons of Aaron and then “consecrate” them in order for them to serve God and the people. God said:

“Clothe Aaron and his sons with these garments, and then dedicate these men to their ministry by anointing their heads with olive oil, thus sanctifying them as the priests, my ministers.” (Exodus 28:41, tlb)

So in one sense it means to be set apart for a certain task. I’ve shared this in the 102 Class, and I will often use this example: several of you right now are holding a pen or a pencil in your hand as you take notes. That is a tool that has been created as a writing instrument. Now, you could use it to do other things – you could try cleaning your ears with it, you might try playing the drums with it, and you might have some degree of success doing that with it. But that is not the task it was created or intended for. When you write with it, it is doing what it was made for. It was “sanctified” to be a writing instrument.

² Barclay, 215

As a disciple of Jesus, you are sanctified – set apart, saved – for the purpose and task of bringing the Kingdom of God here on earth while you are here on earth. You have been sanctified to introduce other people to Jesus.

But there is more to it than that – sanctification is not just you making up your mind to be on mission for God, and you setting yourself apart for God, because you can't sanctify yourself; only God can do that. That's why Jesus didn't tell the disciples to sanctify themselves; he asked the Father to do it.

So being sanctified also means to be equipped with the quality of mind and heart and character that are necessary to accomplish your Kingdom task. It means that God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, fills you with his character and nature – his name – so that you CAN accomplish that purpose. That's why Jesus said to his disciples in chapter fourteen – during this final discourse, just earlier in their evening:

“Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask *in my name*, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything *in my name*, and I will do it.” (John 14:12-14, niv, *italics added*)

In other words, when you are sanctified, and you ask Jesus for anything you need to help you accomplish his purposes in this world, in the nature and character and mind and heart of Jesus, then Jesus will always, always, always give it to you.

God has saved you and shielded you and sanctified you for his special service in this world. That special service is that we should love and obey him and should love others and introduce them to Jesus so that they would do the same. And God has not left us to carry out that great task in our own strength, but out of his grace he fits us and fills us for our task by the power of the Holy Spirit, if we will place our lives in his hands, he will do it.

So you must pray this prayer of Jesus, too, if you are going to fulfill what you are here for. You must accept God's offer to save you. You must step into his shielding you in this world, and you must give yourself to him to sanctify you. Will you come and pray?

If you are less than these things, you are not being a disciple of Jesus. If you are not saved, you can be – one who is glorifying Jesus and going out for him. Come ask him to save you. Are you are fearful? You need no longer be; God himself will shield you as you carry out his task. Come confess your fear and step into his shield. Do you find yourself failing in your Christian life? Do you not see people around you coming to faith in Christ? You can be filled with the character and nature and mind and heart of Christ to accomplish your task of introducing others to Jesus. Come and give yourself to him.

As we sing, please – come and pray to be saved, shielded, and sanctified.

The Bible says:

“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.
May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of
our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.”
(1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, niv)