

Jesus Prays for His Disciples
John 17:6-19
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6 “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. 7 Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. 8 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. 9 I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. 11 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. 12 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. 13 But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. 14 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. 15 I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. – John 17:6-19, ESV

Introduction: What Do We Need Most?

What do you need most in your life? If I were to ask you that question, how would you answer it, honestly? More money? More time? A better marriage? More satisfaction in your work? More success from your efforts, either at work or at home? More joy? More peace?

Most of us could probably sit down and make a list of things we think are lacking in our lives, things we believe we need most and would be better off if we had. Here’s the trick with making and keeping such a list, even if it’s only in our minds and never actually written on paper or spoken out loud: When we have such a list, it immediately leads to an unspoken question: Why hasn’t God seen fit to provide these things for me? Doesn’t He love me? Doesn’t He know my needs? Isn’t He able to supply what I need? Can I really trust Him?

What does the Bible say?

“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”
 – *Philippians 4:19, ESV*

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!

Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!

Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints,

for those who fear him have no lack!

The young lions suffer want and hunger;

but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing. – Psalm 34:8-10, ESV

So, how do we reconcile what Scripture says and what we feel about our lives? Well, we need to start asking ourselves what the Bible says we really need, don’t we? What if I told you that your greatest need, according to the Bible, is to be sanctified? You might say, “I’m not even sure what that means, and it sounds like some kind

of religious cop-out answer, honestly.” Or you might say, “What does that have to do with my life when I wake up tomorrow morning?”

Well, whether you can fully understand it, accept it, or see the practical benefits of it, it’s true that your greatest need and my greatest need is to be sanctified. That is, we need to be set apart by God for God. We need to belong to God forever, by being reconciled to God, kept by God, used by God and then brought to God at the end of this short life. And this is as true on a Tuesday afternoon at work or a Saturday night at the movies as it is on a Sunday morning in worship.

We know this is our greatest need because this is the heart of what Jesus prays for His disciples on this last night He has with them, just before His betrayal, arrest, trial and crucifixion. He doesn’t pray that the disciples would have lots of money or successful careers or time to finish all the projects they have going at home or a nice vacation to the Mediterranean Coast or anything as short-lived as that. No, He prays for them to be sanctified, and He commits Himself to doing what needs to be done – as agonizing and terrifying and impossible as it will be – to ensure their sanctification, even as He asks the Father to fulfill the promises and purposes He has set in applying the sanctification Christ secures to the lives of His disciples.

So, as we walk through this middle section of the Lord’s Great Prayer. This prayer that Jesus prays on His final night before the cross, in the last moments before the agony of the Garden of Gethsemane, is the true Lord’s Prayer, a prayer that only the Lord could pray, for His people. It’s a preview of the High Priestly intercession that the Lord Jesus lives forever to carry out for His people in heaven at the right hand of the Father.

As we unpack this middle section of this most wonderful prayer, we will see that our sanctification hinges on three critical things:

- First, we need to know who we are and whose we are – What’s our identity and to whom do we belong?
- Then, we need to know where we are – What’s our relationship to the world around us in the time in which we live?
- Finally, we need to know how we grow – How can we continue to progress in realizing and living out the truth of our sanctification in this life?

I. Know First: Who You Are & Whose You Are

“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. ⁷ Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. ⁸ 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. ⁹ I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.

– John 17:6-10, ESV

A. You Are in Christ

The first thing Jesus prays about His disciples is that they are the ones whom God the Father has given Him out of the world. So, from out of all of the world, God has chosen and given a particular people – “the people” – to Jesus.

This line of Jesus’ prayer echoes the truth He taught in John 6:37-39: “*All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.*”

It’s very clear that Jesus is teaching that God gives certain people to Him. That’s what God does. And then, we come to Christ, which means we then believe in Him. In John 6:40, Jesus goes on to say, “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” So, who are the ones whom the Father has given to the Son? They are those who look on the Son and believe in Him.

That’s the same thing He prays here in John 17: “*you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.*” “*They have kept your word*” doesn’t mean that the disciples have been perfectly faithful and obedient to all Jesus has commanded. They haven’t. In fact, in just a little while, they will all flee from Jesus, and Peter will deny Him three times. What “*they have kept your word*” means is that the disciples have believed in Jesus. They have believed that Jesus is who He said He is, the one and only from the Father, full of grace and truth. Or, to use the words He prays in verse 8: “*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.*”

So, how does this translate and transfer to us today? If you have come to believe in Jesus Christ, to look to Him in faith for your salvation as the Son of God and Savior of sinners, you belong to Jesus Christ. You are His and he is yours. Your identity is wrapped up in Him, and He is glorified in and through you.

Last week, we observed that the first thing Jesus prayed was to be glorified, and then here in today’s section of this prayer, He prays, “*I am glorified in them.*” So, if you believe in Jesus, you belong to Jesus, because God the Father has given you to Jesus, and Jesus is glorified in you.

B. You Belong to God

This also means that you belong to God the Father. You are His child and His treasured possession. God the Father gave you to Jesus because you belonged to Him. This may seem like a strange way of thinking about this, but this is exactly how Jesus prays and it is what the Bible teaches: “*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***”

In Acts 18, the Apostle Paul is preaching the Gospel in the city of Corinth. He had earlier been driven out of some other towns, and while he is in Corinth, we’re told this: “*And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.” And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.*” (Acts 18:8-11, ESV)

God says to Paul, “I want you to remain in Corinth and keep preaching the Gospel without fear, ‘for I have many in this city who are my people.’” He doesn’t say “who will be my people.” God has already identified and claimed many people in the city of Corinth, who have yet to come to faith in Jesus, as belonging to Him. They are His, and so, through the preaching of the Gospel, He is going to give them to Jesus, and they are going to believe in Jesus and be saved.

Just a few chapters earlier, in Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas are in Pisidian Antioch, and there we read this account of their ministry in Acts 13:49: “*And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.*” Notice, God doesn’t say, “As many as believed were appointed to eternal life, but rather, “*As many as were appointed to eternal life believed.*”

This is exactly in keeping with what we saw Jesus say in John 10 about His sheep to the Jewish leaders who rejected Him:

the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”²⁵ Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me,²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me,^[a] is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”

He said, “You do not believe because you are not among my sheep” and then He said, “My sheep hear my voice.” Why did you hear the voice of Jesus calling you through His word? Why did you respond in faith and come to Him for eternal life? Because you are His sheep. You are one the Father has given to Him. You are one of God’s people. You were appointed to eternal life. That is why you have come to believe, and that is why you will never be cast out and you will never be snatched away and you cannot be lost!

You growth in sanctification in Jesus absolutely depends on knowing, believing, and living out these truths: This is who you are and this is whose you are.

2. Know Next: Where You Are

Next, you need to know where you are in relation to the world and times in which you live: In summary, what Jesus says is that you have been chosen out of the world but left in the world, but you are not of the world.

All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. – John 17:10-16, ESV

A. You Are IN the World

So, you need to know very clearly that you are in the world. Jesus first acknowledges, “they are in the world” and then later prays, “I do not ask that you take them out of the world.” You may think this is rather obvious, but many Christians over the years have taken an escapist approach to the world, wanting to run and hide from the reality of the place and time in which we are called to live.

You live in the world. In 1 Corinthians 5:9-10, Paul writes, “*I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.*” Sadly, some Christians over the centuries have failed to heed this advice and have sought to withdraw from the world and to hide out in some monastic-type enclaves where they only have to talk and interact with other Christians.

When we gather here on Sunday mornings for worship, we are gathered together by the Lord so that we can be built up in the Lord and then sent back out by the Lord into the world. But more on that later . . .

B. You Are Not OF the World

While we are in the world, we are not of the world. Jesus says, “¹⁴*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.*” And then He goes on to pray, “*They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*”

To live in the world but not be of the world means that we need protection. That’s why the heart of what Jesus asks for in this section is for our protection. He tells the Father that he has guarded the disciples, but now He asks that the Holy Spirit take over that work of keeping and guarding God’s own. This is not primarily a prayer for protection from trials and tribulations. We need protection, not from hardship – which God uses to sanctify us - but from the evil one, who seeks to destroy our faith and tear us away from Christ. But we can be assured that God the Father answers Jesus’ prayer and He knows how to keep His own!

3. Know Now: How You Grow

Finally, one we know who we are and whose we are and have a realistic understanding of where we are, we need to know how we grow. Again, our greatest need is to be sanctified, to be set apart by God and for God, to belong to God and to be kept by God and to live for God until we are with God forever. This is something God does definitively and irreversible when He gives us to Jesus Christ, we come to trust in Christ, and we are sealed in Him. But it is also something we grow in loving out. We grow in our experience of it in our daily lives, and this happens in two main ways, as highlighted in Jesus’ prayer here: Through growing in the word of God and through growing in the mission of God in the world.

¹⁷*Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.* ¹⁸*As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.* ¹⁹*And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.*

A. Sanctified by the Truth

We are sanctified in the truth and God's word is truth. So, if our greatest need is to be sanctified, then we need to know that we are sanctified in the truth of God's word. This means both in the word of God incarnate, Jesus Christ, and the written word of God, the Bible. Remember how John's Gospel begins, *"In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God."* Jesus is the word, and Jesus is our sanctification. I Corinthians 1:30 says, *"because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption"*

But the way we come to Christ is through the written word of God, and the way we grow in Christ is through the written word of God. As Romans 10:17 says, *"faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."* We don't read the Bible so we can check it off of our list of religious duties dutifully performed, like a child holding his nose and taking his medicine. No, we read the Bible to see more of Jesus and to know Him better and to grow in Him. But to do so, we must read, study, pray, listen and obey the word of God!

B. Sent INTO the World on Mission

As we grow in Christ through the word of God, we live out our sanctification in Christ by going out into the world, sent by Him: *"As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."*

God the Father sent God the Son into the world to be the light of the world, to shine in the darkness and show forth the truth, beauty, goodness, love and righteousness of God. Jesus sends us into the world on the same mission. He calls us the light of the world. He is the light of the sun, and we are the light of little moons that reflect His light. But we are called to the same mission: Speak the truth in love, Preach the Gospel. Show the character of God. Reach out to demonstrate the love of God. Be hated and persecuted and still love. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good, for the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness cannot overcome it.

So, that's your greatest need, and that's what Jesus prays for you. May we go out today and wake up tomorrow morning knowing confidently who we are, whose we are, where we are, and how we are called to grow in His word and go forth on His mission!