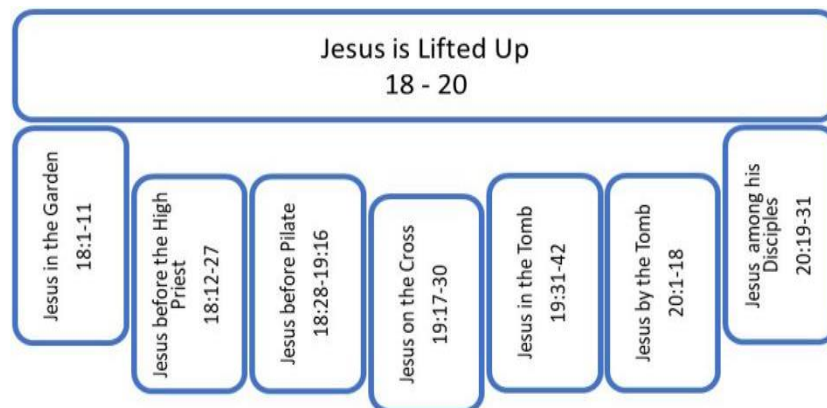


Lesson 30: John 17:6-19 Jesus Prays for His Disciples

Introduction



Jesus began the prayer of John 17 with a request for his own glory. As the center of all that is good and beautiful and true, Jesus rightly desires the magnification of his own glory through the cross and the restoration of the glory he has always shared with the Father. If you love Jesus, your heart sings when his name is lifted up in honor and praise. You yearn for his glorification, that the whole world would know him as he truly is.

Let's read again this first request at the beginning of his prayer. This is John 17:1-5,

¹ Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, ² even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. ³ This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. ⁴ I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. ⁵ Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

The glorification of Jesus works out for our best as well. God is love. Love is essential to his very nature. When his nature is magnified, his love is magnified. The magnification of his love is the magnification of his care for our well-being. Jesus makes God known and in coming to know God we enter into life. That's the connection between his glory and our good. This is eternal life, that you know God and that you know Jesus Christ whom God has sent. When God's glorious nature is made known, people enter into relationship with him and experience life.

The rest of the prayer is a mix between supplication for the disciples and an expression of the heart of Jesus. Preparing this lesson, I came to realize I need two more lessons to cover this prayer in full. We will address the middle of the prayer right now in this lesson and the end of the prayer in the next lesson.

In the middle section, verses 6-19, Jesus makes three more requests of the Father. These requests are all for his disciples. Jesus asks the Father to (1) "keep them in your name," (2) "keep them from the evil one," and (3) "sanctify them in truth." We will consider each request in turn.

The First Request For the Disciples: Keep them in your name. (John 17:6-12)

The first request for the disciples is in verse 11. Jesus asks the Father to "keep them in your name." What does that mean for you, that you are kept in God's name? What does Jesus mean by that? Let's read verses 6-12 and consider the words that lead up to this first request.

⁶ I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. ⁷ Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; ⁸ for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received *them* and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me. ⁹ I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world,

but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours; ¹⁰ and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹ I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, *the name* which You have given Me, that they may be one even as *We are*. ¹² While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.

Jesus begins verse 6, “I have manifested your name to the men you gave me out of the world.” The first great theme of this Gospel is the nature of Jesus Christ. That theme was not John’s idea. Jesus came into the world to reveal God, to manifest his name, to make his nature known. There is a double effect of manifesting God’s name. Jesus is both magnifying God’s glory and bringing people into true relationship with God. To truly know God and enter into relationship with him is to participate in his life. Jesus came to manifest the name of God. He is the light who has come into the world. He makes God known.

How do men and women enter into true knowledge of God? That’s the second great theme of John, the nature of faith. What does it mean to truly believe? Three words in this prayer highlight this theme. They are the words “know,” “receive,” and “believe.” John has used these three words interchangeably throughout the Gospel. He introduced them in the prologue. I’ll read from the prologue and then from the prayer, so you can catch the repetition.

First, this is the prologue, John 1:10-12.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not **know** Him. ¹¹ He came to His own, and those who were His own did not **receive** Him. ¹² But as many as **received** Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who **believe** in His name,

And this is the prayer, John 17:7-8.

⁷ Now they have come to **know** that everything You have given Me is from You; ⁸ for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they **received** *them* and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they **believed** that You sent Me.

We have encountered in John Gospel people who claim to know Jesus without knowing him, to receive Jesus without receiving him, to believe in Jesus without believing in him. John has maintained this tension between true belief and false belief. This is that second theme: what does it really mean to believe in Jesus? What is the nature of faith?

He set the tension up immediately in chapter 2, right when we begin the story. After the water to wine miracle in chapter 2 John summarized in verse 11.

¹¹ This beginning of *His* signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples **believed** in Him.

This is true belief. It is based on the self-revelation of Jesus. Jesus manifested his glory. They saw it, they saw something of his true nature, and they believed. The nature of that belief is not explained here yet. It’s just stated. We are getting this example of true belief to set up the tension with what’s getting ready to come.

Later in the chapter, at the Passover in Jerusalem, we are told in verse 23, “...many **believed** in His name, observing His signs which He was doing.” That sounds positive. Here are more who believed. But then we read verses 24 and 25.

²⁴ But Jesus, on His part, was not **entrusting** Himself to them, for He knew all men, ²⁵ and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.

There is a problem. We do not know what the problem is, yet. Something is wrong with the belief of the many at Passover. They claim to trust in Jesus, but Jesus does not entrust himself to them. Jesus sees into their hearts. Jesus knows something we do not know. Jesus knows that something is wrong with their belief.

These believed without really believing. As the Gospel narrative progresses, we encounter Nicodemus in chapter 3 who claims to know but does not know. We encounter Galileans in chapter 4 who claim to receive, but do not really receive. We see disciples turning away in chapter 6, unable to accept Jesus' challenge to eat his body and drink his blood. We see so-called believers in chapter 8 bristling at the suggestion that they need to be set free. We hear a crowd of people in chapter 12 shout "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD," but we doubt the faith of this entire crowd. And we see finally in chapter 13 one of the twelve go out into the night with betrayal on his mind.

Belief is a tricky thing. If you've been around church, around Christians long enough you know this. People can profess anything and a lot of us learn to profess things at a young age before we've grown into it. Claiming to believe is not the same thing as truly believing on Jesus' terms. True belief requires a work of God in the heart and begins a process of spiritual transformation. The one who has truly believed has been born again. That true belief is not always easy to discern.

What about these eleven men? Jesus says they're going to scatter when he is taken. Do they truly believe? Well, Jesus is here indicating that, yes, they actually do truly believe. In spite of the failure that's getting ready to happen, these men are true believers. And he indicates that both from the perspective of what God has done and the perspective of how these men have responded.

Notice that in verse 6 Jesus said, "I have manifested your name to the men whom you gave me out of the world." From the human perspective we use the terms "know," "receive," "believe," "see" to describe the human response to Jesus. That's what the person does. But from God's perspective we are those whom God gave out of the world to Jesus. Jesus describes further, "they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word." The action of God precedes the response of man. The believer is one who has been set apart from the world for the family of God.

Jesus also describes the disciples from the perspective of their own action. "You gave them to me and they have kept your word." To keep the word of Jesus is a mark of the true disciple. To keep the word means to accept the truth of Jesus about God and about yourself and to keep God's commandments, applying his word to life.

This is not all Jesus says about these disciples. Not only do they keep his word; he also applies all three key words from the prologue. He says, "They have come to **know**...they **received** [your word]...they **believed** that you have sent me." You can't affirm it any stronger than that. Jesus had already affirmed their faith of his disciples in chapter 13. He told Peter, "You don't need to be washed because you are all clean." And that affirmation is being repeated here. These men have believed, they have received, they know.

Affirmation is necessary. We still have question about the disciples. Peter is going to deny Jesus. Everybody's going to run away in the garden. They are going to feel like they don't believe. And in a Gospel that's raising this question about people who believe without believing we're not sure, either. Do the disciples believe or do they don't believe? Jesus said, "If you love me you will obey." We might wonder about these men. They don't obey. They run away. Have they truly believed? We know that grapes grow out of the true vine. If you abide you produce fruit. So, what does it mean that you claim to believe and run away, or deny Jesus? You don't produce fruit? True belief produces fruit, right? Yes, but apparently not with perfect consistency.

The disciples' faith is messier than that. We might say this is because the Holy Spirit has not been given and just wait until Pentecost. And that is a good point. The coming of the Holy Spirit significantly increases the potential of changed life. The Spirit brings power and relational access to

God. Does the coming of the Spirit remove the mess? You know it doesn't, right? Not completely. I am reminded of Galatians chapter 2, which reports the time Peter gave into Jewish pressure and stopped eating with Gentile believers. This is the Peter whose life was so dramatically changed at Pentecost, who courageously accused the Jewish crowd of murdering the Messiah and who, as a result, led 3000 people that day to place their faith in Jesus. And yet, here by pressure of what's called the Circumcision Party, here he is rejecting brothers and sisters who are gentiles, here in Galatians 2, and he gets rebuked by Paul and rightly so. Apparently, failure and mess continue even for Peter as part of the Christian experience.

I believe that's one reason Jesus is affirming the disciples here in this prayer, so that they will hear from him, from his perspective, from the one who sees into the heart: you have truly believed. In spite of what is getting ready to happen, you are mine. You are secure because God gave you to me, even though you fail. Even though you're going to run away. God gave you to me. You are mine. You have believed truly.

We exist in transition. We are in an "already, but not yet" state of having been born again, but not yet fully restored into who we are meant to be. We wait for that completion in Heaven. We who truly believe still struggle to live in line with the new birth that has already begun in us.

The growth of these men will mark them as true believers. But what makes them truly secure is the work of God on their behalf. We cannot come to Jesus unless it has been granted by the Father (John 6:65). So, while he affirms their response to him from the human perspective, Jesus also emphasizes their salvation from God's perspective, "They were yours and you gave them to me." It is not the consistency or strength or purity of your faith that keeps you secure. It is the fact that God has indeed taken you out of the world and placed you in his hand. It is the reality that, indeed, you have believed. You are now free to pursue him in all the ups and downs of faith, secure in the strength of his hands, secure in his grace, secure in his love.

We might then describe these men as born-again. I am not sure if that is the right language to use before the cross, before Jesus sends the Holy Spirit. It is definitely the right language for us. We who have believed in this era of the New Covenant, we have been born again. But even though it is right to describe ourselves this way, as born-again, that is not the focus of Jesus in this prayer. Jesus focuses on the idea of a realm change. This is the idea he keep repeating. They have been removed from the world and given to Jesus. He's going to pray to God as Father, so they've been removed from the world and brought into a new family. The next few verses give us the actual request. Listen for the request and also listen for this idea that we have been taken out of the world. That's who they are now, that defines them. These are verses 9-12,

⁹ I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours; ¹⁰ and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹ I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, *the name* which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We *are*. ¹² While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.

The disciples are God's. They have believed in Jesus and have truly entered into relationship with God. That objective truth is the foundation of their security. They are safe because God has them in his hand.

But they are not home, yet. Jesus is going home. Jesus can say, "I am no longer in the world." But of the disciples he says, "they themselves are in the world." Earlier, Jesus said they had been given to him out of the world. That means their allegiance is no longer to the ruler of the world, or the values of the world, or even their own flesh. They belong now to God. They are members of his family, his kingdom. But unlike Jesus, they are not going away. They continue to live in the world.

It is not an easy existence. We still have habit patterns and values and desires formed by our existence as sinful human beings in sinful human society. That all affects us and goes with us into the family of God. We have belonged to the world. And we now continue to live in the world, and that's a problem. We have attraction to the world. And when we do try to change or live differently, we experience opposition from the world, when we reject values of the world and try to live according to the values of Heaven that we see in the Bible, then that creates tension, opposition with the world. And that resistance is outside of us, with people who oppose these new values we're trying to live, and it's inside of us, our own flesh, our own thought patterns, we still want to go with the world.

So, this is what we have. We have disciples given by God to Jesus who have truly believed. And though set apart from the world system they grew up in, they still physically live in that world system. And in light of that reality, what does Jesus pray? What do we need as disciples if we're going to live for Jesus in this world? Jesus prays, "Holy Father, keep them in your name." That's his prayer. It's a little bit odd at first.

We need to think about that request. First, Jesus prays to God as Father. So that's in line with everything we know about the Lord's prayer. You know, "Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name." Wow, both of these things connect, right? There he says, "Let your name be made holy." Here, he's calling him "Holy Father." So this is who you are now. You are a son or a daughter who used to be an enemy of God by nature, a child of wrath, but who has been born again into a new family relationship. God is your Father. Jesus calls him "Holy Father." God is himself set apart from the world system. He is pure and good, without sin or evil. You have been accepted into a holy family. And this is what you need from your holy Father: you need to be kept in his name. Jesus says that he did this himself for his disciples when he walked on earth. It is a need that needs to be met. But Jesus is going. And he asked the Father to continue to meet this need. What is the need? What does it mean to be kept in his name?

To word "to keep" normally means in John "to observe" or "to do" as in "to keep the Sabbath," you're observing the Sabbath, or "to keep God's Word," or "to keep the commandments." The meaning here, though, is slightly different. Here, "to keep" means "to guard" or "to hold in place."

Verse 12 helps us understand the request. Jesus goes on and says,

While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.

To keep the disciples is to guard them, to keep them safe. How are they kept safe? They are kept safe "in God's name." When the world tempts you, when life is a mess, when you fail, when you are confused, when you suffer, when you doubt, what keeps you safe?

When the world tempts you to a series of behaviors, it starts with a small step, then another small step and then another small step that leads you to a place you don't want to be, what keeps you from taking that first step, that seemingly innocent step leading ultimately to sin? Your knowledge of the character of God gives you strength to stand. You stand by faith in who God is even if you don't understand the wisdom at play; you don't understand why it's good to stand and not take that step, you obey because you trust his character. You trust in the true nature of his name and who he is.

Or how about when you suffer? When you suffer and your suffering shatters your assumptions about the Christian life and you become disoriented, what keeps you from disillusionment or bitterness? Your conviction that God is good keeps you safe. Even when you don't feel that God is good, you hold onto his name by faith. "I know you're good." And you hold on until you naturally believe it again with your heart. But you need to be kept in the name of God. He is good.

When the world assails you with challenges to your faith, what helps you withstand the storm of doubt and confusion? You may not know whether you have the science right. You may not understand the justice of it all. You don't know how to argue or reason your way out. You may not be there, yet. But

you know God. You know his name is love. You know he is Creator. You know he is real. And you hold on to him, according to how he has revealed himself to you, and that keeps you safe.

All these trials, whether it's lust or suffering or doubt, they all tempt the human heart to redefine the nature of God. That's a way to resolve this. Some people come up with the extreme redefinition and reject God's existence altogether. But most people come up with a definition of God that fits their personal needs and societal norms. We can come up with a God who does not mind our sin so much, or who does not even call a certain behavior - sin. We can come up with a God who is not really good enough or powerful enough or involved enough to stop our suffering. Maybe that's the answer. We can come up with a God who fits all the modern theories of science. We can come up with a God who fits our ideas of justice or love or morality. We can come up with a God who fits our scheme or racial superiority. We can come up with a God who includes all religions. We humans are very good at coming up with names for God. And that's the temptation. When relationship with God does not fit life as we see it, when it creates some barrier to our understanding or to our behavior, we can just simply redefine the nature of God to resolve the problem.

Jesus prays, however, that God would protect you from that; that he would keep his own in his name. When you doubt, when you suffer, when you are tempted, when you are bored, Jesus knows you need to be kept in God's name. And Jesus prays that you would not fall into the trap of solving life by giving God a name of their own choosing. "Protect them from the human sin of making you in their image. Keep them in your name." Jesus has steadfastly refused to let people define him. That's what we've seen through this Gospel. We do not name Jesus. Jesus names us. We derive our definition from him.

This is eternal life, to know God as Jesus has revealed him to be. Life is found in accepting the self-revelation of Jesus. Christian religion that seeks to name God in some other way, other than that revealed in Scripture, is removing the most basic principle of life from its followers, from people who call themselves Christian, and you're not seeking God according to the Gospel delivered in his word; according to the truths about the Creator, the Holy One, the Just One, the Moral One. If you don't accept the name of God revealed by God, you reject life. Abundant life is found in hard times by holding on to the name of God as he has revealed himself to be. Keep them in your name. That's the prayer of Jesus.

The second request made by Jesus is related.

The Second Request For the Disciples: Keep them from the evil one. (John 17:13-15)

Jesus also prays, "Keep them from the evil one." That request is in verse 15, so let's read 13-15.

¹³ But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. ¹⁴ I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil *one*.

Jesus makes clear the opposition of the world. Christians should not intentionally provoke the world to hatred. We are called to live in love and gentleness. And yet, we are also called to live according to the truth of who God is. God defines for us what is right and good. Living according to the values of heaven will bring us into conflict with the world. If there is no conflict at all then something is quite likely wrong with the way we live for God. We are no longer of the world. We are in it, but our worldview, our sense of right and wrong, our moral behavior must at points diverge from the morality and values of our society.

Jesus knows that when we come to him, we become at odds with the world. Still, he does not want to remove us from the world. He came into the world himself to save the lost. He has given us this same task. We are to emulate Jesus by living in the world and yet, not being of the world.

The prayer to keep us in God's name is mirrored by the prayer now to keep us from the evil one. We need God to protect us from Satan, from the Evil One.

Jesus said earlier in John 12:31, “now the ruler of this world will be cast out.” He was speaking of Satan, that’s the ruler of this world, the Evil One referred to in this prayer. But if Satan is cast out, why does Jesus pray to God to protect us from the Evil One? Is that prayer necessary? You assume it is if Jesus prayed it and it’s a good example of why we have to keep reading the whole context. One verse might reveal just part of the story. We have to keep reading to get more of the story.

So, like us, Satan exists in something of an “already, not yet” state. We might think of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus as D-Day, like the invasion of Normandy that spelled the end of the Third Reich. The end was sure. Hitler was going to be cast out. But a lot more fighting happened because the enemy refused to accept defeat. And so, V-Day was still yet to come.

Paul writes in Colossians 2:14-15 that through the cross Jesus canceled our debt and “disarmed the rulers and authorities...having triumphed over them.” The term “rulers and authorities” in Paul can refer to human powers but extends beyond that, also to the spiritual powers behind human rulers, all the way up to the primary spiritual power of Satan. God triumphed over and disarmed Satan through the cross by canceling the debt owed by human beings. Satan has already lost the war. He just refuses to admit defeat. He battles on. And for his own reasons, God allows him to continue to exist in this fallen world. The full realization of Satan’s defeat is yet to come. Jesus will return. Satan will be bound and cast into consuming fire.

But for now, the Evil One is still active, and we need God’s protection. I think it is worth asking what kind of protection we can expect. Two things have helped me to think this through. One is Psalm 23 and I just keep thinking back to Jesus as our Shepherd in **chapter 10 (at 31:05 - chapter or verse?)**, and the other is the experience of Jesus, what happens in the life of Jesus.

Jesus is our good Shepherd. He makes us lie down in green pastures. He leads us beside quiet waters. He restores our soul. He guides us in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. That means we live for his glory because that is real life. But living for his glory in this world means that we don’t remain beside the green pastures and the quiet waters all the time.

We also walk through the valley of the shadow of death. We suffer. And we struggle. We have enemies. God does not keep us from all the suffering. Does he keep us from the Evil One? How does God answer this prayer?

Let’s consider Jesus. Did God keep Jesus from the Evil One? In John 14:30 Jesus said, “I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming.” Jesus was speaking about his pending arrest and crucifixion. The Evil One would participate in the suffering and death of Jesus. He had entered into Judas and lead Judas out to betray. Did God keep Jesus from the Evil One? Did he?

I have to say yes and no. God allowed the Evil One to bring suffering and death onto Jesus. God did not, in that sense, fully keep Jesus from the power of the Evil One. But Jesus never gave in to the Evil One. Jesus remained steadfast through the cross. And in the end, his suffering brought about complete victory. Jesus was raised from the dead and ascended to Heaven at home with God. Did the Evil One overcome Jesus? No!

Your greatest calling in life is to continue with God through to the end. Whatever he’s called you to do, wherever he’s called you to live, your greatest calling is to hold on to God and to live for him. We represent God in this world. This world is broken. We are going to experience some rest and restoration, green pastures, God working in our soul. We experience good from God in this world. We also experience the valley of the shadow of death. Satan is going to oppose us and God is not going to protect us from all of the suffering.

I do believe that God constantly protects us from the Evil One. God has put some kind of restrain in our flesh, in our societies and on Satan. Maybe I think about this because I’m quite a melancholy personality, but I think about how much more broken our societies could be, how much more chaotic, how much more evil. The order that exists in society, however flawed, reflects God’s protection to some degree. I feel like if God just totally removed his image, if Satan was given

complete freedom to steal and kill and destroy, I believe we would live in just complete chaos and evil and pain and suffering. Some societies begin to approach that but not most of the societies we live in. So, I think God is constantly protecting us from the Evil One.

I also believe that we who are in Christ experience more specific protection and we are just simply not aware of it; that Satan opposes us, and he would harm us. We know the suffering we do experience. We do not know what he has protected us from. As a teenage boy, I wonder how many near-death experiences did I really have? It's amazing how many of us make it into adulthood. But if Satan is working spiritually to oppose us, I think that God is protecting us much more than we're aware of. And that's not a battle that he wants us to focus on, but he wants us to be aware that there is spiritual opposition behind evil that we see in the world. I do not believe that Satan is free to exert his malice on us.

And yet, even though God is protecting society in general, and he's protecting believers specifically, God does allow us to participate in the sufferings of Christ. Just as Jesus entered into a broken world and experienced the reality of that brokenness, God wills that we live in the brokenness of the world. Sometimes we open the door for Satan with our own sin. But sometimes God allows suffering in our lives to bring about good for us and for others ultimately. God has his purposes. It's a story of Job. It wasn't Job's sin. God allowed it.

God calls us to walk paths of righteousness for his name's sake. We live to bring glory to God and sometimes that means we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. He does not always protect us from that. He does always walk with us through the valley. His rod and his staff protect us as we engage in the battle against the Evil One. But sometimes we're injured.

God's plan is to bring us out again on the other side. He does desire that we experience joy in this life through our relationship with him. In verse 13 Jesus said, "But now I come to you; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy made full in themselves." Jesus wants us to see things as he sees things; he wants us in relationship with God to experience joy. In our next lesson we will talk more about the heart of Jesus to better understand this joy he desires for us. At this point, I think we understand that joy comes from our relationship with God, whether we lay down in green pastures or walk through the valley of the shadow of death. This is life, to know him. This is our need, to remain in the truth of his name. And it's in this relationship that we experience joy.

Psalm 23 ends this way, "Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow you all the days of your life." I believe this goodness and lovingkindness consists of blessings in life. God gives us good things. But even, God gives us himself. That's what this goodness and lovingkindness consist of. They consist of knowing God. And whatever this life brings, the good shepherd leads us on to ultimately "dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Jesus' prayer for us ought to be sobering. We need to be kept in God's name. And we need God to protect us from the Evil One. Finally, we need God to sanctify us in truth. That is the third request. Let's read 16-19.

The Third Request For the Disciples: Sanctify them in truth (John 17:16-19)

¹⁶ They are not of the world, even 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, I also have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

Some English translations add in the word "consecration" here, I think just for style, to change things up. I like that my version keeps the text consistent with three references to "sanctify." Jesus repeats that three times. It would help further if English would show us the connection between the adjective "holy" and the verb "sanctify." The connection is clear in John's Greek. It is the same root word. To sanctify literally means "to make holy."

Jesus addressed God as Holy Father in verse 11. "Holy Father, keep them in your name." Now he asks the Holy Father to make the disciples holy. We belong to a holy family. And to be made holy is to be

cleansed and set apart for divine work. We addressed that idea in the introduction to the prayer in our last lesson. This is a prayer of sanctification, of being set apart. We are being commissioned to go into the world. God takes us out of the world, he makes us new in Christ, and sends us back into the world to the good works that he prepared in advance for us to do. Our good works all vary according to our calling, and our giftedness, and our opportunities, our sphere of influence. We have different good works to do. You have your family. You have your workplace. You have your school. That is where you do your good works, according to who God has made you to be. What we share in our good works is this sense of we exist to bring glory to God and to help others come into relationship with him. And we do these good works as a body. We are one family. So each one of us shares this need to be cleansed and set apart for our works, whatever those works are, for our participation in the family of God in this world.

So how are we sanctified? How does God set us apart? The prayer is that we be sanctified in truth. Initially, you need to know the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that you can enter into him.

This connects closely to the request that we be kept in his name. To live for God in this world, we need to hold on to his name, not according to our definition of who God is, but according to his own self-revelation.

This request makes explicit what we've already said, and that request: we need to hold on to God's name as he has revealed it: to his true name, to his true nature. This request makes our need to be set apart in the truth more explicit, and it tells us what truth we are talking about. Jesus says, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." And that connection between word and truth is the same connection that Jesus made previously in that famous text, I mentioned it already several times, John 8:31-32,

³¹...If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

This is one of those really quotable Bible verses that gets misused all the time because a critical part is usually left off. The first part of the text is usually dropped out, about continuing in the word of Jesus. The part that is kept that you often hear is, "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." And we've always got to ask, what truth? What truth will set you free? What truth has the power to do that? Truth is such an abstract concept. Are we talking about his truth, or her truth, or that truth, or this truth? What truth? Jesus defines the truth for us as "my word." The word of Jesus - that's the truth that has the power to set you free. No other truth has the power to set you free. The truth of Jesus has the power to set you free. The crowd listening to Jesus specifically rejected that truth. They refused to believe they needed to be set free. They remained in bondage. The truth doesn't always set you free. It's the truth of Jesus that you have to receive that sets you free.

And here, it's that truth that sanctifies you, that truth that makes you clean and that makes you useful for the service of God, and that truth is the Word of God. And Jesus didn't not only mean here, when he said, "my word," he doesn't mean only the words he spoke in his ministry. He means the words of Scripture, the whole of his Word.

A follower of Jesus Christ is one who is set apart by the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and who is continually growing in the knowledge and application of the truth of Scripture. You're set apart by the Gospel and you're growing in the truth of Scripture. This is the only way to not be of the world and yet live in the world as a witness for Jesus. If you're not committed to being set apart by truth, the holding on to the worldview of God, and growing in your understanding of that worldview, if you're not committed to that, you will become of the world again. But Jesus intends for us to live in the world but separate from the world in how we see things. He asks the Holy Father to set us apart as holy so that he might send us into the world just as he was sent into the world. He was the sent one. Now we are the sent ones. We are not sent to live and proclaim our own version of truth. That sets nobody free. That doesn't bring us life and it doesn't help anybody else. We are sent to live by and proclaim his truth: the truth he has revealed.

Just as Jesus connects our being sent with his having been sent, he also connects our being sanctified with his having been sanctified. This is in verse 19, and this is the last verse in our lesson, “For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.” Jesus sanctifies himself by setting himself apart for the work of the cross. That makes it possible for us to be sanctified. By the atonement Jesus made for us on the cross, we are set apart as clean and made useful for service.

Do you think of yourself in that way? Do you think of yourself as having been set apart by Jesus as clean and useful for service? Do you think of yourself as a sent one? If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ that is how he would have you think of yourself. You are set apart. You are sent out. You have been separated from the world and sent back into the world.

To pursue the purpose God has for you, you need these three things. You need God to keep you in his name, you need God to protect you from the Evil One, and you need God to sanctify you in truth.

The prayer of Jesus implies a response on our part. We don’t just sit around and wait for God to do all that. If he has prayed these things for us, then it stands to reason we ought to also pursue these same things. We ought to hold onto his name, pursuing relationship with him as he has revealed himself to be. We ought to stand against Satan’s schemes, holding on to the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. And we ought to seek sanctification through growing knowledge of the Scripture.

I think our study of John lines up great with these three requests. And so we pray, just as Jesus prayed: God help us to know you as you have revealed yourself to be. Keep us in your name. Protect us, Father, from the Evil One. Give us courage and strength to continue on in the works you have called us to do. And sanctify us, Lord, in your truth. Make us clean, set us apart for useful service. Help us to understand your Word and live by it, for your glory. Amen.

Reflection questions

1. Read John 17:6-19. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
2. How does Jesus describe his disciples? What words does he use to communicate their spiritual state?
3. Again, the concept of name appears. John uses the concept in 1:12 of the prologue teaching that being a child of God depends on “believing in his name.” In the preparation of his disciples, he tells them as they pray to “ask in my name.” In the purpose statement of John 20:30-31 he says that he has written so they may have “life in his name.” And here in this prayer for his disciples Jesus asks God, “Keep them in your name.” As you think about the concept of name through John, what is Jesus asking God to do? What do you think it means to keep believers in the name of God?
4. How does the request in 17:15, “Keep them from the evil one,” relate to keeping them in God’s name? What danger is implied?
5. What does the third request in 17:17, “Sanctify them in truth mean”? What does it mean to “sanctify”? How is Jesus sanctified? How are we sanctified? What is the connection to truth?
6. How does this request relate to the other two? How is it similar? What does it add or how does it develop our understanding of being kept in God’s name?
7. As you consider yourself as one who is sent to live in the world as a witness for Christ, how important is it that God fulfill these requests for you?
8. Pray to the Father, using and agreeing with the language of Jesus here to make your requests.