

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

17 After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you,² since you have given him authority over all people,^[a] to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. ⁵So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

⁶"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. ¹²While I was with them, I protected them in your name that^[b] you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost,^[c] so that the scripture might be fulfilled.¹³ But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves.^[d] ¹⁴I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.^[e] ¹⁶They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

²⁰“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us,^[f] so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. ²⁴Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

²⁵“Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

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Christ Prays for Us

John 17

Kerra Becker English

Christ prays for us. Did you know that? Have you thought about it? We pray for others. We pray for ourselves. AND Christ prays on our behalf. This morning _____ posed the question, “Who is in a position to condemn?” And we all replied, “ONLY Christ, and Christ died for us, Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, CHRIST PRAYS FOR US.” *Christ prays for us.*

In John’s gospel, where some of his lengthier prayers are given a voice, we get a feel for how Jesus prays for us. Much like we all do, he prays first for the people closest to him, his disciples. Jesus prays as though these people belong to him, a gift from God so to speak. They have heard his teachings about God’s love and responded with the willingness to give their lives to this message. For that, Jesus is grateful, humble, and super-protective of this bunch. He tells God, “I guarded them. Not one of them was lost, except the one destined to be lost.” Then Jesus goes on to say, and I paraphrase, “Now, God, you must protect them in my name when I’m no longer around to keep them safe in person. They will be hated because of this world, but there’s no getting around it, they must live in it.” He’s worried, and rightfully so. There will be those who want the disciples to meet the same horrible fate as Jesus. Jesus begs and pleads for God to protect them.

This prayer is made exceptional by its true ordinariness. We too pray our yearning prayers for protection for those near and dear to us. We pray for our loved ones not to be hurt by

the world. We want our parents guarded and our children kept safe. We lift up safe travels for our friends and offer grateful praise when the tests come back negative. Sometimes, it seems as though those prayers get amazing results. What originally was the \$1,200 plumbing estimate gets fixed for only \$325. That NEVER happens. Was someone praying for me this week because, I tell you, that seemed like a miracle?

But it probably wasn't a miracle, and I know that too. We had the "third" toilet in our house fixed – a luxury really if there ever was one. We got lucky. It wouldn't have killed us to pay the upper end of that bill, though most certainly, we didn't want to. I was thankful for this happy news, so I did my happy dance after the plumbers got in their truck. Did it have the effect of making me grateful to God? It sure did - for a solid recommendation from Ross, and for insightful plumbers, and for less of a hit to my savings account – absolutely I was thanking God for being smiled upon by the universe. But I would be advocating a terrible theology to say that I got that bonus "because" I love Jesus and I know that Jesus prays for me. There are a few pastors out there who would do that – attribute their good fortune and mansion on the beach to the magnitude of Jesus' love for them. There was one who recently tried publicly to get a congregation to pay for a private jet – out of their love and faith for Jesus. That can get dangerous!

I say that because sometimes even the most earnest prayers for protection seem to lose their touch. It's the one household toilet that gets busted and there isn't enough money to pay for it. It's reading the jarring facebook message that informs you that a friend your age lost her husband to a heart attack this week. It's seeing "that look" on your doctor's face. And these just scratch the surface of the stories about the people that we know. What about protection for the people that we don't know?

Jesus prayed his prayer through the disciples to the lives that would be touched by the disciples and on, and on until the stories about God's love reach you and me. He prays for protection just as we pray for protection, and yet we know and he knew that disease, and death, and destruction, and all the things intent on breaking us aren't going away anytime soon. We cannot, we will not escape or avoid every harm this world has to dish out.

So is Jesus advocating a practice that doesn't work? That would seem rather ridiculous for him to do. However, that's one of the main arguments you hear against prayer. It doesn't work. I don't get what I want. I may not even get what I need. My loved ones still get hurt. They still do dumb things and have regrets. Prayer cannot prevent the tragedies of our lives – so to pray for protection – what's the point?

It's taken me a long time to begin to get a handle on this, and I'm still not quite there yet. I often felt like I would be a failure as a pastor if I prayed for anything too specific, because God might choose a different option. My faith would prove a sham. But now, I realize this isn't exactly the kind of protection Christ prays for. If anyone could have chosen another way out of this life's suffering, it was him, and he didn't do that. Suffering is part of our reality. We can't make it go away. What we can do is welcome Jesus' prayer to be protected from it breaking us. That's what I think Jesus prays for. It's a lot like Paul's understanding in Romans where he says, "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

If we look carefully at John's text here, Jesus prays for his disciples to be protected, not from danger, but from the evil one. We struggle with our interpretations of evil in the world too,

but I tend to think that we know it when we come face to face with it. Jesus binds them to himself in love so that they have a shield from evil and destruction. Judas did not have the luxury of that protection. His greed and his desire for power turned him to deceit and treachery. Jesus' people will still make mistakes and be frustrated by the world's ways, and still get sick, and still die. But maybe, just maybe they will know the really bad stuff when they see it.

For finally, Jesus prays for the kind of love that will bring his disciples, and generations of their followers, together in love. It seems like we have thrown that off as well. The Christian church is about as divided as it could possibly be and still fracturing. The witness Jesus wants us to be making feels obscured in this world, not obvious. And yet, Christ is still praying for us, still mending the broken places, still surrounding us with prayers for protection for this enterprise we now know as the Church. I hope that you will feel that protection, that you will ask Jesus to continue that prayer for us and for our world. There will be times we are still hated for what we believe. The world we live in – the first world – the powerful world is the same kind of world that hated Jesus and his followers. They were a threat to the system. We can't exactly equate the two, but I would encourage you to ponder whether your life is a threat to the system. Does Jesus still need to be praying for your protection? Do you seek to serve the poor, champion the weak, and share the good news of God's love? If so, you may need to be surrounded by Christ's protection so you can face those who would have you be only out for yourself.

Will I still pray for the other kind of protection too? Yep. We have full permission to give our greatest concerns to God. That, in and of itself is a blessing. I need to know that God hears my prayers for my friend Jennie who lost her husband. I need to know that God hears my whispered prayers for the safety of my children and the longevity of my parents. I want to be assured that God is honoring prayers around the globe for conditions beyond the scope of my

knowledge and experience. In that war zone or where families live on a dollar a day, the prayers of a mother for the safety of her children may be far more immediate than the concerns of my children, and yet our prayers are all real, all safe in God's heart. So pray – pray for love, pray for protection, pray for unity, and pray for the Christian witness to grow in its ability to disrupt and disturb the status quo. Stay safe – in Jesus' name. Amen.

Benediction:

"I charge you now as you walk into the future to remember one thing above all else, that no matter how frightening this world may become, no matter how frightening the individual circumstances of your own life may be today or may become tomorrow, you need not be overcome with fear, for God goes with you.

God goes before you to guide you; God goes beside you to be your best friend; God goes behind you to protect you; God goes beneath you to support you and give you strength; and God goes above you to give you vision and courage and hope. Remember that. No matter how frightening the world may become, no matter how frightening the circumstances of your life may be today or may become tomorrow or next week, next month, you need not be overcome with fear, for God goes with you.

Remember that, and the peace of God that passes all understanding will go with you, too. Amen."