

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

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[0 : 00] We hear the words of Jesus from the Gospel of John, chapter 17. It's page 1085 in the Church Bible. Page 1085 in the Church Bible, John chapter 17.

Jesus prays for his disciples. 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. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me, and they accepted them.

They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I'm not praying for the world, but for those you've given me, for they are yours.

All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world.

[1 : 21] And I am coming to you. 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.

When I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction, so that scripture would be fulfilled.

I'm coming to you now, but I say these things while I'm still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I've 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 would take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.

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.

[2 : 43] Thanks be to God. Well, good morning, everyone. Let me welcome you this morning again.

Add my welcome to you. My name's Andy Gemmel. I'm a member of the congregation here. It will be enormously helpful. If you can have the Bible open in front of you, you'll need it this morning. This is a famous and important prayer.

So let me pray that the Lord would help us to understand it. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that we have in front of us the words of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. And we pray, please, that as we consider these words this morning, you will please give us understanding. Open our eyes to what he is saying and what his plans are.

And please give us confidence in him and in all he is doing. These things we ask in his name.

Amen. Amen. Well, let's begin this morning with a rather grandiose experiment in imagination.

[3 : 54] I want you to imagine for a moment, just for a moment, that God had given you the power to do something world-changing tomorrow.

Something of your choice. Something of your choice. You can choose. What would you be asking him for today if you had that power?

Think about it for a moment. What would you ask him for? One thing. Would it be an end to violence? An end to greed?

An end to inequality? Stop all the oil? Well, just imagine you could do one thing tomorrow. What would you choose and what would you ask for today? Tricky question, isn't it?

Because it's hard to work out what would make the most difference. There are so many things you could do that would make a difference. What would make the most difference to the world tomorrow that you could ask God for today?

[4 : 57] Today, we're going to listen in this morning to Jesus' prayer on the night before his death. And I think I can guarantee that what he asks for will blow your mind.

Not because it looks big. Because it seems so small and so narrow and so insignificant.

And so unlike anything we would ever ask that we would never ask it. At this most crucial moment, Jesus does not pray for all the things that we might, if we had the power to change the world tomorrow.

He doesn't pray for world peace. He doesn't pray for relief of famine globally. He doesn't pray for an end to religious persecution or an end to tyranny. He doesn't even pray for the prosperity of his nation, for their deliverance from the Roman tyrant.

He doesn't pray for his family and their well-being when he goes. He doesn't pray for himself and his own safety. Instead, he prays for the 11 guys with him in the room.

[6:09] And he prays for anyone who's willing to listen to the words that they will pass on. That's all he prays for. How does that grab you? Given the scale of the world's problems, why is he just praying for these guys in the room with him?

Seems insubstantial, doesn't it? Out of touch with reality. Well, we're going to dive into that this morning. That deeply intriguing choice of subject for prayer.

Now, I want to cover very quickly three essential preliminaries. Notice, first, this is part one of a two-part prayer focused on Jesus' disciples.

This week, we're looking at the guys who are with him in the room. Next week, we'll be looking at the people who will listen to their message later on. Now, there's an obvious difference between these two groups. The guys in the room have come to believe in Jesus from hearing his words directly.

Every other disciple, including every disciple of Jesus who's in the room today, belongs in verse 20. Just look at verse 20, please.

[7:16] I pray for those who believe in me through their message. We've believed in Jesus, not because we heard his words directly, but because we heard the words of the guys who were in the room.

So, there's a difference between them and us. However, broadly speaking, the concerns that Jesus has for these two groups of people are very similar.

Look at verse 20 again. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.

What does he want for those who are with him? Look at verse 11. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you, 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. Do you notice Jesus wants for both groups, those with him and those later on, a kind of unity?

[8:27] So, there's a similarity, but there's a difference, and we'll explore both the similarities and the differences this morning. Second preliminary remark. Did you notice there's a thing going on in this passage about God's name?

Did you notice that? Look at verse 6. Jesus says, I've revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. And some of you will notice there's a little A beside you, and if you look down at the footnote in the Bible in front of you, there's a more literal rendering of that.

I have revealed your name to those whom you gave me out of the world. What does Jesus mean by saying, I've revealed your name?

Well, I think he means this. I have demonstrated to them your character, who you are, by the words you gave me and the works you gave me to do.

So, when you read name in this passage, think, God's character as revealed in the words and the works of Jesus. It's kind of shorthand for that, I think. Look at verse 11.

[9:38] And again, it's got a footnote. Keep them faithful to your name. Which I think means, keep them faithful to your character that's been demonstrated by my words and my works.

And then verse 12. I have kept them faithful to your name. So, Jesus is saying here, when he talks this name language, he's saying, I've shown these guys who you are by what I've said and done.

I've kept them faithful to you by what I've said and done. And I want you to keep them to what has been shown to them about you by what I've said and done. Okay? That's the name thing.

Third. And this is very interesting. Did you notice there are not many requests in this rather long prayer? There are many words, but not many requests.

I can see only three requests. Verse 11. Holy Father, keep them faithful to your name. Verse 15.

[10:46] Protect them from the evil one. Verse 17. Sanctify them by the truth. Now, as we'll see a little later on, these three requests belong together.

But isn't it interesting? Many words, few requests. So, what's all the rest about? Well, fascinatingly, most of the rest of the words state things about the guys who are with him in the room.

Jesus' words are crammed with statements about them. Interestingly, not things that he hopes might be true of them, but things that are actually already true of them.

Now, we tend to read them as though somehow these are things he's praying that they might have that they don't have already. For example, look at verse 16. Christians quite often say, we need to be in the world but not of it.

as though being not of it was something we had to attain. But actually, that's not what Jesus is saying at all, is he? Just look at the words.

[11:59] He's saying, they are already not of the world. They are. It's already true. And the things that Jesus says that are true of these disciples are absolutely mind-blowing in this passage.

things which must have been huge for them back then and which are huge for us now. And so I want to look at this basically under two headings.

Here's the first. These words show us that Jesus has great joy in these very, very ordinary disciples. Jesus has great joy in these very ordinary disciples. Let me just show you this. The things he says about them are quite extraordinary. Just put yourself in their shoes for a moment.

The big moment has arrived. Jesus is talking about his departure. He's going to leave them. They are not happy about that.

[13:02] He's told them about his coming sufferings. This is worrying for them. In response to his words, they have been largely completely clueless and very afraid.

He's told them that one of them is going to betray him. This has caused great anxiety in the group. Peter has been told just a little earlier on that before tomorrow morning he's going to deny Jesus three times.

That is worrying for him. The disciples could not possibly be described as being at the top of their game at this point in the story. The big moment has arrived.

They hardly have a clue what's going on. The very best they've got is in chapter 16 verse 30. Just glance to chapter 16 verse 30 and what they say.

This is the very best they've got so far. Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God.

[14:07] And Jesus responds really? Do you now believe? A time is coming and in fact has now come when you will be scattered each to your own home.

You will leave me all alone. We really believe that you came from God and you know everything. You do, do you? In a couple of hours you're going to be everywhere all over the place.

The disciples don't look great at this point, do they? But just listen to what he says to his father about them. Now I'm going to start in verse 6 and just skip quickly through this passage and think about the amazing things that he says to them.

And if you were one of them how would these statements grab you? Verse 6. Father, these ones you gave them to me. They were yours and you gave them to me.

And they've obeyed your word. They've been obedient. Verse 7. They know everything you've given me comes from you. That's just what they said a minute ago. I gave them your words.

[15:13] They really accepted them. They believed that I came from you and that you sent me. And so verse 9. I'm praying for them because they're yours and you gave them to me.

Verse 10. These guys are yours and mine and mine and yours. They belong to us. And verse 10. They've brought glory to me.

They really have. And I protected them while I was here and I'm praying that you'll protect them now I'm going. Verse 14. They've begun to experience hatred from the world.

They do not belong to the world any more than I do. And verse 18. I'm sending them to do a very important job. And verse 19.

What I'm about to do by dying on the cross I'm doing it for them. Do you see how nearly every statement says something really big about them?

[16:10] Why is he talking like this? Well I think the answer is in verse 13 and this is a wonderful thing. I'm coming to you now but I say these things while I'm still in the world so that they will have the full measure of my joy within them.

The words that Jesus says to his father are expressions of his joy concerning them. And before he goes he speaks to the father in their hearing about all the things he's so glad about about this lot in the room with him.

So that they will share in his joy that he has about them. Now isn't that an extraordinarily kind thing to do? Isn't it kind? At this moment when he's about to face this horrendous death on a cross tomorrow he's thinking about how they can share in his joy about them.

Such a kind thing to do. Remember who he's talking about here? A bunch of frightened clueless only just believers who are going to desert him within the hour.

Father let me tell you all the things that I'm glad about about them. I'm just rejoicing in them and I want them to know that I am so that they can share my joy.

[17:42] Amazing isn't it? And he's not lying or exaggerating either. The things he says about them are true. The only reason these guys are in the room with him now is that the father and the son have been at work to make that happen.

That's the only reason they belong to the father. He's given them to his son. Jesus has revealed the father to them in many words and deeds.

They have believed him. He has protected them. They now have a completely new identity. They once were part of the anti-god world but not anymore. They are divinely owned and protected and he rejoices in that.

that is the only thing that makes the difference between the guys in the room and the hostile Jewish authorities out there.

It's the only thing that makes the difference. They are divinely owned and protected. These are massive truths and Jesus rejoices in them.

[18:57] Do you notice then the difference between their performance and his joy in them. Their performance somewhere down here.

They are not doing all that well. One of the twelve has already left to betray him in fulfillment of the scriptures.

The rest clueless, fearful, about to run away. One will directly deny him three times but Jesus is full of joy about them.

Do you see that contrast? They are so ordinary but he wants them to know how glad he is about them.

Now folks there's a big difference between them back then and us right here now. Isn't there?

There's a big difference. Jesus is not in that sense in the room. I've no idea what state you come here this morning to church.

[19:56] You might be here for the very first time just looking in. If that's you, you're so welcome this morning. You may have been a Christian for a long time. You might be feeling good spiritually if you've been a Christian for a long time and thank God if that's the case.

But the chances are that you are only too aware of how very ordinary you are. Yes, you do believe Jesus' words and yet you know how you struggle to obey them.

Yes, you no longer feel at home in the anti-God world and yet you still feel it has its hooks in you in some ways. Yes, you find its desires are still alive and kicking inside you though you rather they weren't.

And you know there's no hope for you other than Jesus and you're still in the room and you're still listening to his words. But much of the time don't you feel pretty clueless and ineffective as a disciple.

Well, what matters is not the size of your faith but the kindness of the one that your faith is in. Jesus rejoices in ordinary disciples.

[21:16] Let me say that again. Jesus rejoices in ordinary disciples. Let's just say that together shall we? Just so that we articulate it even though we may find it hard to believe of us together.

Jesus rejoices in ordinary disciples. What kind of disciples does Jesus rejoice in? Ordinary ones. Very ordinary ones.

So let me say that if you're still in the room and still listening to his words and you still know that he's your only hope, know for certain that the only thing that makes any difference between you in the room and the world out there that thinks nothing of Jesus is that you are divinely owned and protected.

That's the only thing that makes the difference. And Jesus rejoices rejoices in that. Can you believe that?

Those people back then are not really different from us in any material sense are they? And he's full of joy about them. Now folks, can I say you might be here for the first time. I hope you can see if you're here for the first time just looking at Jesus that he is not a person who rejoices in the spiritual elite.

[22 : 44] Those who occupy the moral high ground. No, Jesus rejoices in very ordinary disciples who hold on to him as their only hope in life and in death.

Jesus has great joy in these very ordinary disciples. Second, Jesus has great plans for these very ordinary disciples.

Let me ask you, why has Jesus come into the world? Well, back in chapter three of this book we're told that God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world.

That's why Jesus came into the world. Back in chapter one, right at the beginning, John the Baptist introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God who was going to take away the sins of the world.

Do you notice that in this prayer Jesus mentions two things about the world? surprising things.

Verse nine, I am not praying for the world.

[23 : 46] That's a surprising thing, isn't it? He's come into the world to save it. He's just about to die to take away its sins but he's not praying for it. He's praying for this little group of eleven guys.

Does he suddenly not care about the world? Look at verse 15. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

Isn't it surprising? If Jesus cares so much about them, why is he exposing them to danger that they might need to be protected from? Well, I think the answer is in verse 18.

As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. Do you see what's going on here? Jesus came to do a very, very great thing.

To take away the sins of the world. He is about to present himself tomorrow morning as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

[24 : 54] In the end, that will result in the abolition of everything evil and the recreation of the world and the perfecting of ordinary human beings like us.

So why is he not praying for the world but for them? And why is he sending them into the dangerous place which the world is for them? The answer is this.

Everything that Jesus has come to accomplish in the world, everything his sacrificial death is going to do, everything is going to be channeled to the world by the words of the 11 guys in the room right now.

Everything depends on them. Now, is that not extraordinary? If you had a world changing plan, if you were about to give your life so that that world changing plan could happen, would you entrust the whole future of that plan to 11 guys like this?

Do you think? Well, you wouldn't and I wouldn't, but Jesus does. Why? Because he knows that despite their many weaknesses and their cluelessness and their false confidence in their own ability to stick with him, he knows, he knows that they are divinely owned and protected.

[26 : 33] And he knows that the father who gave them to him is able to protect them in that role that he's planned for them. Two amazing things then.

Jesus rejoices in these very ordinary disciples. He wants them to know that so that they share in his joy about them. And he wants them to know that he has huge plans for them that are absolutely squarely in the will of his father for them.

And that is precisely what he prays for. And these three requests are very important. Let's look very quickly at the requests Jesus makes just as we get towards closing.

These three requests show us what's really important in this world age. Number one, verse 11.

Look at verse 11, please. Holy Father, keep them faithful to your name, the name you give me, so that they may be one as we are one.

Notice, this is not, as so many say it is, a prayer for institutional church unity. This is a prayer that the 11 guys in the room, despite the fact that they're about to be scattered and persecuted, will be united in saying the truth about Jesus, that Jesus has shown them by his words and works.

[27 : 59] Keep them faithful to your name so that they may be united in that message about who you are and what you've done. This is a prayer for faithful testimony of these 11 to the words and works of Jesus.

Let me say that institutional unity without faithfulness to the words and works of Jesus is a grotesque caricature of what Jesus is praying for here.

Second, verse 15. Protect them from the evil one. Why does this group of 11 need protection from the evil one, from the devil? Well, earlier in this gospel, Jesus refers to the devil as a liar, the father of lies, and a murderer from the beginning.

Right from the beginning of the world's history, the devil has been killing people by lying to them about God and about themselves. Jesus does not pray that these 11 be taken out of the dangerous world, but they be protected in it.

And the greatest of all the dangers is, what's the greatest of all the dangers in this dangerous world, folks? The answer is lies.

[29 : 22] Lies about who God is. He's a tyrant. He's an oppressor. You'd be better off without him. Lies about who human beings are.

You can be anything you want to be. Lies about what Jesus said and did. He's not really the only way to know God. The devil kills people every day with lies like that.

And Jesus prays that these 11 be protected from those kind of lies. third, verse 17. Sanctify them by the truth.

Your word is truth. To sanctify something just means to set it apart, to distinguish it from something else. This prayer is the flip side of the one before. Protect them from the liar and his lies and his murder.

Keep them in the truth. So folks, these three requests to the Father, they're all really asking the same thing. Keep them faithful to your name.

[30 : 27] Unite them in their faithfulness to your words. Protect them from the liar and his lies. May they be characterized by the truth of your words.

That's what Jesus prays for them. Okay, folks, that's been quite intense. Let's just pause for a moment and let me ask you a question as we close. Did the Father answer the son's prayers for these very ordinary disciples?

Well, two things show that he did. Two absolutely supernatural things show that he did and they're both in the room today.

Number one is this. what you call the New Testament part of your Bible. This is the united testimony of the eleven guys in the room about God's character as revealed by the words and works of Jesus. They were scattered and they were persecuted. But despite being scattered and persecuted and killed, they were united in the message about Jesus. And we have in writing their testimony.

[31 : 47] And this is the only way, the only way that God has provided in our world for us to know the truth about Jesus. It might seem very ordinary to you, the Bible on your shelf or your bedside table.

It is entirely supernatural. supernatural. And a very gracious gift. And without it, we would be absolutely lost. And amazingly, it came from those guys in the room and the message they passed on.

The father answered the son's prayers, didn't he? What's the other supernatural thing in the room? Well, the answer is, you are. You are the supernatural thing in the room.

Look at verse 20. You in the room are today listening to the testimony of those 11 guys about Jesus through this part of their scriptures.

You're united in wanting to know Jesus and get his message out to the world. You've believed in him through their words. You have. This gathering this morning, and many like it, millions like it all over the world, are a demonstration that the father in heaven has answered this son's prayers on that night before he died.

[33 : 10] And you might look weak and feel weak. But the means Jesus chooses to do what Jesus wants to do are very, very powerful indeed.

look what their words have done all over the world through history. Look what their words have done.

Think how powerfully the son, the father has answered the son's prayers. So folks, what is the most important issue in the world?

What is the thing that you could most helpfully pray for if you wanted to change the world tomorrow? Well, the most important issue in the world is whether you listen to truth or whether you listen to lies.

Whether you listen to the words of these 11 about Jesus or any other claim to the truth, the means God chooses look small and weak to our eyes.

[34 : 17] Death on a cross doesn't look powerful, does it? Praying for 11 dodgy friends doesn't look powerful, does it? But look how powerful it's been.

And if you're a person who's attending to those words, know for certain that though it might not look powerful and you might not feel powerful, there is absolutely no doubt in Jesus' mind that he is going to accomplish precisely what he wants to accomplish through ordinary people and ordinary words.

Let's pray together. Just a moment to reflect for ourselves and what God has said to us and to respond to him in our hearts and then I'll pray for us.

We thank you, Father in heaven, that you have richly answered the prayers of your Son. We thank you that you kept those 11 in your name and you protected them from lies and you sanctified them in your truth.

And we pray therefore for us that you would make us now and always very, very attentive to their words. Help us to treat them as a supernatural gift from you which is what they are and richly powerful in accomplishing your purposes.

[36 : 00] We thank you also that the things you choose to use are very, very different from the things that our world chooses to use. And though we might feel weak and insignificant and unconfident, we pray that you would give us confidence that the means you've chosen to do what you want to do in your world will do what you want them to do.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.