

Holy Intercession John 17:1-26 (Part 1)

Three pastors were walking down the strip in Vegas ... (sounds like the beginning of a bad joke or the story of a moral collapse) ... but it's neither.

- I was with two of my closest pastor friends for an event in Vegas (Pastor Ryan in the Bay Area and Pastor Harvey in L.A.), and we were walking to lunch (w/our sweat and ferocious wives walking right behind us, ensuring proper behavior in Sin City!).
- Along the way, Pastor Harvey asked me what I did for my “quiet time.”
 - (I'm not sure that this discussion was happening a lot on the strip!)
 - I shared my typical routine, and then he urged Ryan to share his practice....
 - Ryan reluctantly shared what he does on Sunday morning. He gets up at 3:30am, puts on a pot of coffee, takes a shower, and prays for about three hours – for nearly 200 guys every Sunday morning... He has a list of names of pastors he prays for – he says, “it's not only for their benefit, but it helps me from being too focused on myself.”
 - I was like, “wow... that's remarkable and challenging.”

It reminded me of my first class w Shaddix in seminary, as we were reading E.M. Bounds, about how these older saints got up so early to pray... Someone asked Dr. Shaddix his pattern... I was like, “Is God awake at 4:00am? I got up at 7:54 for this 8:00 class, and I prayer walked over here. Does that count?”

I share that not to suggest you necessarily do the 3am or 4am thing (though you might!), but to simply say that it's good to have fellow believers to inspire and instruct you in prayer.

There are many biblical examples of prayer to instruct and inspire: Moses, Elijah, Daniel, the Psalmists, Hannah, Nehemiah, and more.

But the example *par excellence* is Jesus.

The gospels record Jesus praying a lot, but John records here the longest prayer of Jesus in the Bible.

- I would argue it's the greatest prayer in the Bible.
- **Thomas Manton spent 45 sermons on it and wrote some 450 pages!**
- **What can we gain in thirty minutes?** Hopefully encouraged by our Lord's prayer.
- We get to overhear Jesus' holy intercession.
- This is holy ground.
- He is interceding for the disciples and all who would believe after them.
- That includes us!
- Isn't it encouraging to hear someone pray for you?

- It's one thing to be on someone else's prayer list, but to know you are on Jesus' prayer list is even more thrilling, encouraging, and emboldening.
- Yes many biblical characters all prayed, and yes we can learn from each of them.

- **But what saves us today is that Jesus Christ is praying for us!**

Hebrews 7:25

²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Romans 8:34

³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Is there anything more encouraging than to know that you are the subject of Jesus' intercessory prayer?

Certainly there would be some difference between his present intercession here and what we find in John 17, but John provides important insights about the things that concern Jesus about the life of believers on earth.

- **You are on Jesus' prayer list.**
- **You should love this Savior.**
- **You should trust this Savior.**
- **You should consider what he prays, and build your life on the priorities of Jesus.**

You can learn a lot about a person by what he or she prays.

- What someone prays reveals their deepest desires and their most central beliefs.
- Here we get an inside look at the heart of Jesus in prayer.
- What matters to Jesus?
- He expresses his vision for the disciples and the church through prayer.

Outline: The prayer is difficult to divide precisely and numerous attempts have been made. It's challenging because it's a unified prayer.

1. Jesus Prays for His Glorification (1-8)

[Some stop at v. 5, but I think verses 6-8 expand on verses 1-5, showing how the Son glorified the Father on earth].

2. Jesus Prays for His Disciples (9-19)

- a. For their **protection** (9-16)
- b. For their **sanctification** (17-19)
 - i. Set apart from something: *sin* (17-19)
 - ii. Set apart for something: *mission* (18)

3. Jesus Prays for Those Who Will believe (20-26)

In all three sections is the **desires for the Father's will to be carried forward in redemptive history**.

A Few More Introductory Notes:

1. There are some similarities **between Jesus' farewell discourse and prayer with others in Scripture.**

- Dying leaders often provided famous last words to followers and spoke of the future. (**Gen. 49**)
- These final words **often included final prayers.**
- In Deuteronomy, Moses' prayer has a similar structure to that of Jesus' final prayer.
 - Moses first reflects on his own life and ministry in **Deut 32**, and then he prays for his followers and their future in **Deut 33**.
 - The same pattern is displayed in **Leviticus 16**, when Aaron has received instructions on how to sacrifice and pray. He first prays and worships on his behalf (**11-14**), and then he offers a sin offering and prayer for the people (**15-19**).

Here we see the greater Moses, the Greater Mediator, the Great High Priest, the sacrificial Lamb is himself (**17:19**), doing the same – with an even greater degree of importance.

2. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, of Gethsemane prior to Jesus' arrest is not included in John. Instead we have this prayer in John 17, which happens sometime prior to Gethsemane.

3. Many often read this prayer in a “**gloomy**” (as Morris says), but it's not like the Garden prayer to come. This one is both celebration and intercession.

- But notice the opening phrase, “When Jesus had said these words...” (v. 1)
- He has just declared, “**I have overcome the world!**” (**16:33**)
- **That's not gloomy, but triumphant.** It's filled with **gospel optimism.**

#1: Jesus Prays for His Glorification (17:1-8)

He prays for the Father to glorify him in the completion of the mission on earth (1-3), and then for the Father to glorify him in his return to heaven (4-5).

A. Glorification in the Completion of His Mission (1-3)

v. 1: Most Jewish folks prayed out loud and you could overhear them, as John obviously did. And it seems Jesus intended for the disciples to hear him.

Lifting up one's eyes to heaven was also common.

“**Father**” – Jesus' way of praying (six times in this prayer; eg, **17:11; 17:25**).

- It's the pattern we follow (Gal 4:6; Matt 6).

“**hour has come**” – the time of his death and the events to follow. It's time (cf, Jn 2:4).

- He will be arrested in the next chapter.

“**Glorify your son that the Son may glorify you**”

- Here Jesus is asking for the Father to glorify the Son as he finishes his mission.
 - The Son's obedience would be to the glory of the Father.
- He has spoken of **the hour of his “glorification”** repeatedly.
 - **To the world, the cross was the place of shame; but for Jesus it was glory.**

V. 2: Jesus has **authority over the whole human race**, as the King.

- He will give life **through his death**.
- That's why the fathers use to say that the Son was **"reigning from the cross."**
- The people would taunt him, "If you're the King, why don't you come down from the cross."
- **But we're saved today not because he came down, but because he stayed up.**
- And by dying there in our place, he has given us life.
- "God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor 5:21)

v. 3: This prayer not only serves to highlight the priorities of Jesus in prayer, but it also teaches us **further revelation (read)**.

- In this verse, Jesus **defines eternal life clearly**.

Eternal life

- Life that begins upon belief, not just when you die.
- It's about quality of life not quantity of days. It's life now and life forever.

Eternal life involves **"knowing"** the **"only true God"** and **"Jesus Christ whom you have sent"**

- Not just a belief in some kind of God but **"the only true God"**
- Not just a belief in the real God but in the Messiah, Jesus.
- **You don't know God if you don't know Jesus.**

Application: Notice the emphasis on **"knowing"**

Unbeliever: Becoming a Christian is not about copying some moral code. It's not about "getting religion" (whatever that means). It's not coming to know God through Jesus Christ.

- **"knowing"** is a word that conveys **intimacy and relationship**, but just knowing facts. **"Adam knew Eve"** – he just didn't know her name or her hair color. He was in a relationship with her.
- Jesus said he will have to say to many on the last day, **"I never knew you"** (Matt 7).
- Don't play games. Do you know him?
 - **You can come to church services every week and not know him.**
 - You can go to seminary and not know him.
 - These people in Matthew 7 were doing great works, but didn't know him.

Believer: Being a Christian is about knowing Christ more & more, treasuring him above all.

- **Philippians 3:10-11** – this is what Paul wanted....
- So many of Paul's prayers priorities **"knowing God"** (**Eph 1:18; 3:19; Col 1:9-10**).
- Keller says somewhere that **"knowing God" truly and deeply (through Jesus) is like the thread that untangles a knot**. That is, the biblical writers emphasized right knowing of God because our other problems are **symptomatic of this great problem**.
- **Carson:** After talking about all the problems that exists in churches around the world concurs saying... **"We need to know God better."**

- Packer, “**Once you realize that your main business in life is to know God most of your problems fall into place.**”

B. Glorification in the Return to the Father (4-5)

V. 4: Jesus now reflects on how his incarnation reflected God’s glory in the world (**read**)

- How did he glorify the Father? **By doing the work the Father gave him.**
- It was **for the Father’s glory and our eternal good.**
 - The Father’s glory; he pleased the Father. Earthly sons bring their dad pleasure when the day something hard... Jesus did the hardest thing...
- Our good: **“It is finished” — we share in that triumph!**
- **When your fav team wins the championship, you rejoice in the victory but you didn’t contribute to it!**
- **In a similar way, we are rejoicing in the triumph of Jesus. We share in that victory**
- **Team Jesus - let that encourage you**

V. 5: “**before the world existed**” — Jesus is pre-existent. **He is returning to glory.**

- **What was God doing before creation? “Creating a hell for people who asks such questions” (Augustine).**
- We don’t know everything but we know there was perfect harmony, intimacy, and love within the Triune God. (Cf **John 1:1 — “with” — “to, toward...” relationship/17:24**)
- Now he anticipates his brutal death and looks forward to **returning to his rightful place with the Father in glory.**
- **Ps. 24** — early Fathers read as the Son’s ascension and coronation. “Let the King of Glory Come in!”

6: How did Jesus summarize his work on earth? It involved **“manifesting your name to people you gave me.”**

- **Name** refers to **the entire character of the person.**
- **Jesus has revealed the Father to us.**
- **At the cross, Jesus would put on the display the holiness of God, the justice of God, the love of God, the sovereignty of God and more.**

7-8: This ministry while offered to the world **only some have benefited from it.** They are:

- Those whom the Father has given to the Son (**6b**)
- Those who have kept his word (**6c**)
- Those who know that Jesus came from the Father and revealed the Father’s truth (**7**)
- Those that have received the word and come to know the truth... (**8**)

He accomplished his work among the disciples, and this now leads to his prayer for them...

#2: Jesus Prays for His Disciples (17:9-19)

We will break it down in two parts: **protection** and **sanctification**.

A. For Their Protection (9-16)

9-10: Jesus speaks of this believing remnant now.

- He's not praying for the whole world, but for his disciples.
- This doesn't mean God does not have a love for the world and the world isn't invited to believe (they are); but Jesus is speaking of the unique status of the disciples.
- They belong to Jesus and the Father.

i. Protected by God's Power (11)

V. 11: "Holy Father, keep them in your name." – Help them persevere!

- The shepherd is leaving them, and they are about to be in the wilderness.
- So Jesus prays that they will be kept in the Father's name – in his will by his power.
- "Some trust in chariots, some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God." (Ps 20:7)
- "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run to it and are safe." (Prov 18:10)
- Our help, our protection, our security is in the name of our God.

ii. Protect Their Unity (11b-12)

11b: The purpose of this perseverance/protection is "so that they may be one."

- Unity is a major theme in the third major section of the prayer, regarding those who would believe after the disciples (**v. 20-21, 23**)
- Jesus is clearly concerned about unity.
- No doubt, he would rebuke our unnecessary divisions and no doubt we should pray for unity.
- Notice: He doesn't pray that the disciples would "become united" but that they would "continue to be one" – that's the force of the present tense.
- Jesus establishes unity, but we maintain it (Eph 4:1f).

"Even as we are one"

- Our unity is to reflect the loving unity between the Father and Son.
- **The Trinity isn't gossiping about each other at the coffee shop!**
- **They aren't tearing each apart on social media!**
- There is no rivalry or jealousy within the Godhead.
- Jesus is praying for this kind of spiritual unity
- Not a certain structural unity, but a unity of mind, heart and will.
- Remember, these disciples have had arguments like "who is the greatest" among themselves. Jesus wants that to die.
- My friends, avoid foolish controversies, and love your brothers and sisters in the body of Christ; avoid divisiveness and pursue unity.

iii. Protect them from the Evil One (12-16)

12: “I have kept them in your name...”

- “I never lost any of your kids”
- Have you misplaced a kid before? There’s a reason we box them in back here. Some of you have free range kids!
- My boys are taller than me, so they lose me sometimes!
- Jesus doesn’t lose his sheep. He finds them.

But then there was **Judas who was never with Jesus in the first place.**

- Judas faked it... He was a deceiver, a liar, a murderer, like his father the devil.
- Part of the crucifixion event involves **the betrayal of Judas**, which reminds us of the spiritual warfare involved in the cross. (**Jn 13:27**)
- Jesus is **about to crush the head of the ancient foe.**

Judas is held accountable; Judas’ actions remarkably fulfill Scripture; and Judas’s actions were all the result of Satanic influence.

- In sovereign mystery, all of this is true.

Regarding the devil’s influence in Judas’ life, this verse not only reminds us of the cosmic spiritual warfare at the cross, but also of the warfare that we face as we persevere and fight for unity.

- **Why is it so difficult to persevere to the end?**
- **Why is it so difficult to maintain unity?**
- **It’s because we have an enemy!**

13-14: It is that enemy that Jesus speaks of specifically in the following verses...

13: Notice again the theme of **“joy”** – this matters to Jesus!

- He has spoken all these things to them for their joy (and ours).
- “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” (**Jn 15:11**)
- **Not being “of the world” doesn’t mean you don’t have joy! It means you have a different kind of joy – a Christ-centered joy.**
- His teaching fuels our joy.

14: Jesus gave his **“word”** to the disciples.

- That was the supremely valuable thing he gave.
- What a gift to now how the written word!
- Those who have the word are **“hated by the world”** like Jesus was.
- Those who have the word are **“not of this world.”** Their identity and citizenship is in heaven.

15: Here’s the specific prayer for protection from **“the evil one.”**

- He doesn’t ask the Father to take them out of the world.

- Jesus doesn't want to remove you. He wants to protect you from the evil one.
- Remember "The Lord's Prayer?" "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil [or the evil one]"

16: Notice again, the prayer is not removal from the world...

- We are in the world but not of the world... This is how we are salt and light.

Application: Protection from the Evil One

- Jesus recognizes the power of the evil one, even though he's defeated and he's headed for the pound, he still barks and bites. (see 14:30; 1 John 2:13-14; 3:12).
- "We know that we are children of God and the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1 John 5:19).
- **Jesus knows that by choosing to follow Him the disciples are inviting warfare.**
- **And so are we.**
- Let's never forget this. (1 Pet 5:8; Eph 6:10-20)
- Let us take refuge in Christ, as we do his work in the world.

B. For Their Sanctification (17-19)

Sanctify (*hagiazō*) is about something being made **holy, or set apart.**

- Sanctification involves both being set apart *from* something, and set apart *for* something.
- We are set apart from sin, and set apart for mission.
- Carson: "In John's gospel, sanctification is always for mission."

... Set apart from something: sin (17, 19)

17: So here's the dilemma for the disciples...

They are in the world. The evil one is at work.

- But they can't leave the world.
- So Jesus first prays for them to be protected from the evil one, and now he prays that they would be "**sanctified by the truth.**"

19: Again "**sanctify them in truth**" in v. 19.

So how is it that we are to be set apart from the contaminating effects of this world?

- By the truth. (cf., **Romans 12:1-2**).
- **Satan lies; false gospels and false ideologies abound, our own hearts deceive us, but the truth sanctifies.**

Application: Holiness is not about being isolated from people, or rejecting the good gifts of God he has given for us to enjoy in this world (1 Tim 6:19); holiness is about being set apart from sin and becoming more and more like Jesus.

- Remember Jesus was around sinners all the time!

- Monasticism, living on private grounds with no contact with society is a human invention, not Jesus' design.
- You can separate yourself from people but that will not ensure holiness.
- Ever watch that strange movie, "The Village"? These folks think they can create this sinless atmosphere by removing themselves from everyone, and creating their own little commune. But what they find is that their little village was soon filled with sin and corruption as well.
- That's because sin is not something that is just "out there" (in the world); it's something that is "in here" (in our hearts).
- Therefore, the battleground for holiness is found internally in our hearts.
- We need the purifying power of the gospel to sanctify us!
- Ps 119: "How can a young man keep his way pure?" The question of the ages.
 - Not by isolating one's self from all people.
 - Not by going to live in a desert! (Some have tried this and failed)
 - David says, "by guarding it according to your word."
 - "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."
- If you aren't reading/hearing/mediating on God's word you will fail to grow in holiness.

... Set apart for something: mission (18)

Another reason why holiness does not mean isolation from the world is that we have a mission to fulfill: We are **set apart for something**: *Mission*.

- Your life is not to be aimless but purposeful!
- **Jeremiah** was "set apart" before birth *for* mission.
- **Paul** said the Lord has "set him apart" (Gal 1:15) was set apart that he "might preach him among the Gentiles."

Christ mission has set the pattern for the disciples' mission (and ours).

- He was "sent into the world" and we are "sent into the world."
- This sending is mentioned again at the post-resurrection appearance: "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." (Jn 20)
- Our God is a sending God!
 - He sent the Son into the world.
 - He sent the Holy Spirit to the church.
 - He sends us into the world to bear witness to Jesus Christ.

It means we live incarnationally. We enter into people's world; we enter in to hear their doubts and questions. We enter in to their loneliness, and point them to Jesus.

So then, we don't live holy lives by *isolation*, but by *infiltration*.

- We are not to withdraw from the world, but be witnesses in the world.
- You can't do this if you are constantly in the Christian sub-culture.

Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Out of the Salt Shaker*.

We must not become, as John Stott puts it, “a rabbit-hole Christian”—the kind who pops his head out of a hole, leaves his Christian roommate in the morning and scurries to class, only to frantically search for a Christian to sit by (an odd way to approach a mission field). Thus he proceeds from class to class. When dinner comes, he sits with the Christians in his dorm at one huge table and thinks, “What a witness!” From there he goes to his all-Christian Bible study, and he might even catch a prayer meeting where the Christians pray for the non-believers on his floor. (But what luck that he was able to live on the only floor with seventeen Christians!) Then at night he scurries back to his Christian roommate. Safe! He made it through the day and his only contacts with the world were those mad, brave dashes to and from Christian activities.

No, we are sent into the world; we are not to be conformed to it, but we are to engage it with the gospel.

We are sanctified for mission, and we are also sanctified through mission.

- If you envision spiritual growth as only consisting in a series of Bible studies; or reading books, then you are missing something vitally important: mission

This sending is not for the good of this broken world; to see unbelievers become disciples, but it's also **a means by which we become more like Jesus.**

- You will grow as you are challenged and as you pursue mission.
- If you are on a church planting team, you will be challenged.
 - It will force you to be sacrificial, generous, hospitable;
 - It will cause you to pray more;
 - It will help get your priorities in alignment with the Kingdom.
- **If you aren't living on mission, your spiritual life will struggle.**
- Do not merely focus on the pietistic disciplines (inward disciplines) when it comes to holiness (Bible reading, prayer, etc); also give attention to the missional disciplines (outward disciplines) evangelism, church planting, mercy ministry, etc).

V. 19: Look again at the first part of this verse: “And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.”

While our mission is like that of Jesus, his mission was unique.

“for their sake I consecrate myself”

- He is talking **about his death.**
- He is dedicating himself to completing his mission.
- He knows what lies ahead: Golgotha.

It is **“for their sake”**

- He dies for sinners in order to make them holy.

“that they may also be sanctified in the truth” – his death has their (and our) sanctification in view.

- It is because of his death that we are justified before God and now have the desire for sanctification.
- He has changed our identity, our status, and our desires.
- Jesus finished his mission, rose from the dead, and ascended to the Father, where he is now interceding for us.
- He has sent the Holy Spirit to us and sent us into the world, to tell the nations the good news of the gospel.

Final Reflections

Let me summarize three overarching ideas...

1. This prayer provides an example to follow.

- There are many people in Scripture and many people in this life that serve to instruct and inspire us to pray. But Jesus is our premier example.
- He just didn't teach on prayer; he did it. He modeled it.
- He valued communion with the Father. So must we.
- He intercedes for us now.
- Have you spent time in unhurried/unhindered prayer lately?
- Are you praying for other believers?
- **“He who loves me most, loves me in his prayers” (JC Ryle)**

2. This prayer highlights the priorities we need.

- We noted several of them: perseverance, unity, protection, sanctification – purity and mission.
- This is Jesus' vision for his disciples and his church.

3. This prayer shows why we adore the Savior.

- What a Savior we have!
- Prior to dying as our sacrificial lamb, he prayed for us!
- He poured out his life in ministry; poured out soul in prayer; poured out his blood as our substitute.
- We should love him.
- We can trust him.
- He is interceding for us, right now!
- So do not fear. Rest in him.