

Message #54

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JESUS AND THE UPPER ROOM DISCOURSE (Part 5):

PRAYING IN JESUS' NAME

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

There is a certain vocabulary that is common in our churches and Christian groups. Some of these words and phrases come right out of the Bible. Some of them do not. I suspect that the meaning of many of these words is not clear to outsiders and sometimes even to insiders. Consider a couple of examples. Some Christians pray for a hedge of protection around fellow believers. Does that mean that they want a Christian landscaper to come in and plant certain bushes in their yards? That terminology has a Biblical basis in Job #1.

Or what about when we Christians speak about a hope that someone may be convicted of their sins? Does that mean that we want that person to go to jail? No, the terminology about conviction comes right out of the chapters that we have been examining in John's Gospel. But it may not always be understood by outsiders. Are there other terms that you can think of that we frequently use in Christian circles that may not always be understood by outsiders, or even insiders?

"Born again." "Rapture." "Saved."

Another term that comes to my mind is "praying in Jesus' name." An outsider might understand that to mean that the pray-er is praying as a follower of Jesus. That would be basically right. When we saw this terminology used last week in #16, I expressed the hope that we Christians would not treat this term as magic words, that we would recognize that we pray as sinners who claim that our right to be heard by God is because of Jesus' death for us on the cross, that we seek to pray as Christ's representatives on earth, and that we seek to pray according to His will and character.

We residents of the Las Vegas area might pray for the Raiders to win the Super Bowl or the Golden Knights to win the Stanley Cup. We might do that recognizing that our right to pray comes because of what Jesus has done. But it is not a prayer that has much of a Biblical basis in God's revealed will. So it may not be so effective. It may be a prayer that doesn't qualify as being done in Jesus' name.

In the passage before us today, we have the longest recorded prayer of Jesus in the Bible. This prayer has certain aspects that are unique to the situation in which Jesus was praying. But it also has characteristics that provide us a model or pattern for what it means to pray in Jesus' name.

Chapter 17 is the last section of what is called the Upper Room Discourse. Chapters 13-17 of this Gospel written by the Apostle John describe the conversation of Jesus with His disciples which takes place in an upper room in Jerusalem. The occasion is the Passover feast. Judas Iscariot has just left the group to collude with the religious leaders to have Jesus arrested. Later this night Jesus will be arrested. On the next day He will be crucified. Because we went over these chapters in more detail a few years ago, we are doing a quicker overview now.

JESUS' HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER TEACHES US TO PRAY...

In this chapter I find seven things for which Jesus prayed. (PROJECTOR ON--- JESUS' HIGH PRIESTLY...) From His example, I find seven things about which we can pray if we want to be praying according to His will.

1.

First, from vv. 1-10, which you can find on p. 903 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs, Jesus' high priestly prayer teaches us to pray FOR JESUS TO BE GLORIFIED. (JESUS' HIGH PRIESTLY... 1. FOR JESUS TO BE...) We read, beginning in v. 1 of #17, **"When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. I have manifested**

your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.”

The Hebrew word for “glory” in the Old Testament was originally used to mean “heavy.” So the word came to be used in situations where people were regarded as heavy, or important, or deserving of honor. Eventually it was used in this way of God. The idea was carried over into the New Testament. The *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* says that the glory of God refers not to His “**essential nature but [to the] luminous manifestation of His person.**” In other words, the glory of God is the outward display of who He is.

In v. 4 in our passage, Jesus says that He has glorified His Heavenly Father by carrying out His ministry of teaching and doing miracles. He has glorified His Father also by simply becoming a human being. For Jesus was the visible manifestation of God. In #1 v. 14 of this book, (JOHN 1:14) John wrote, “**And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.**” In who He was and in what He said and in what He did, Jesus demonstrated and reflected the character of God the Father.

In v. 5 Jesus prays for the Father to glorify Him--- Jesus. (PROJECTOR OFF) In #7 v. 39 and earlier in this Upper Room Discourse, #13 v. 31, Jesus used this terminology in reference to His coming death and resurrection. That seems to be the same idea here. Jesus is asking His Father to sustain Him through this coming crucifixion and to raise Him from the dead on the third day. Perhaps His later ascension into heaven is also in Jesus’ mind. By going through this painful death and rising later from the dead, Jesus is anticipating that He will be honored by God and by at least some of these human beings around Him, as they come to realize the significance of what He has just accomplished.

There is an instructional manual for children which finds its origins in the Presbyterian Church. It is called the Westminster Shorter Catechism. At one point it asks this question: (WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM) “**What is the chief end of man?**” The prescribed response is: “**To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.**” Theologians have generally recognized that this is perhaps the best short answer to a question about the meaning of life.

The mission statement from this educational institution (LET EVERY STUDENT...) reflects a similar idea and is based on v. 3 of our passage. It reads, **“Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life (John 17:3).”** (“Rules and Precepts,” #2) The educational institution is Harvard University. The statement was adopted in 1636. I have a feeling that it is no longer a part of their mission statement.

There are many ways in which God the Father and Jesus can be glorified. The Triune God is glorified by obedience to His word, by worship, by serving one another, by loving one another, and by praying for Jesus to be glorified.

One particular way in which Jesus is glorified is referenced in our passage and in the Harvard statement. It is by people coming to know Jesus so that they can have eternal life. In vv. 2 & 3 and v. 8 Jesus mentions that the disciples around Him have believed and have received eternal life. In v. 9 He anticipates that others will come to this same faith through these disciples. So praying in Jesus’ name includes prayers for Jesus to be glorified. One way in which He is glorified is by people placing their trust in Him and receiving the gift of eternal life.

2.

Second, this prayer teaches us to pray FOR CHRISTIANS TO HAVE PROTECTION FROM THE WORLD. (JESUS HIGH... 2. FOR CHRISTIANS TO HAVE...) This is the lesson from vv. 11 & 12. Jesus says, **“And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”** The verb “keep” means “to guard, preserve, protect.” This protection is to be done in God’s name. It is to involve the character and being of God.

In #10 Jesus compared Himself to a good shepherd. His followers were compared to sheep. In vv. 27 & 28 (JOHN 10:27-28) Jesus said, **“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”** The Gospel writer uses a triple negative to stress the eternal security of those who become the followers of Jesus. They have eternal life. They can never perish. But they can become ensnared by the world.

We have seen that the term “world” in John’s Gospel has a number of different meanings. (PROJECTOR OFF) Back in v. 33 of #16 Jesus says that tribulation is part of living in the world. “World” here could be understood as the realm of all human beings. Sometimes it simply describes “unbelievers.” We have also seen that “world” can refer to a way of thinking and behaving that is opposed to the true God. That seems to be what is in view here.

While Christians may have eternal security, this does not mean that we cannot be messed up and engulfed by a world system. It can even happen to us pastors. In the last year two pastors of megachurches in the Chicago area have been forced out of their churches because of behavior that reflected the world’s thinking rather than the behavior and teaching of God. If this can happen to Christian leaders, it can happen to any of us. So we need to pray for one another to have protection from this world system. This is part of what it means to pray in Jesus’ name.

3.

Jesus’ high priestly prayer also teaches us to pray FOR CHRISTIANS TO HAVE JOY. (PROJECTOR ON--- JESUS’ HIGH... 3. FOR CHRISTIANS TO HAVE JOY) That is the lesson of v.13. **“But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.”** Isn’t it great that Jesus wants us to have joy?

If you look back at v. 20 of #16 you will see that Jesus said in our lesson last week, **“Truly, truly I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy.”** Jesus anticipates that the immediate effect of His death upon His disciples will be sorrow. They will have grief in seeing their Master suffer a horrible death and fearing that He is gone from their lives forever. But they will experience joy when they see Him risen from the dead. This joy will grow and become fuller as they learn what this death of the Messiah really means. It means forgiveness of sins and eternal life and the certainty of the fulfillment of all of His promises.

It is the deeper understanding of these spiritual truths that we want for ourselves and our fellow Christians. Thus we are to pray for fellow Christians for this understanding and the joy that comes with it.

Jesus knew that these disciples would face great hostility from the world around them. He knew that future generations of Christians would also face hostility. Yet we who are His followers can still

experience joy. That joy comes from a realization of the spiritual status and spiritual resources that we have. It comes from a realization that we are part of a cause which is worth dying for.

Missionary doctor Paul Brand was a medical intern in London in 1940 when German bombs fell from the sky every night. He recalls that physical hardship was a constant companion. He writes, **“Yet I have never lived among people so buoyant.”** A survey taken after the war found that 60% of Londoners who lived through the blitz remember it as the happiest period of their lives. How could this be? It was because they were convinced that they were part of a great cause that was worth dying for. Such is the situation for us who are Christians. Thus we are to pray for one another that we might have joy in the midst of an often hostile world.

4.

Fourth, Jesus’ high priestly prayer teaches us to pray **FOR CHRISTIANS TO BE KEPT FROM THE EVIL ONE**. (JESUS’ HIGH... 4. FOR CHRISTIANS TO BE KEPT...) Jesus says in vv. 14-16, **“I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.”**

“World” in v. 14 and v. 16 refers to the world system in opposition to God. It is the way of thinking and behaving that is opposed to Jesus and His mission. “World” in v. 15 may have a slightly broader frame of reference. It is probably the world of people.

Jesus wants His disciples to be out of the world system but not out of the world of people. He wants His followers to be engaged with people and with culture. In the early Middle Ages, some Christian leaders decided that the world of people was evil and that the best thing to do was to live in the desert in monasteries. In that way, Christian leaders could avoid the temptations of the world and devote themselves to prayer and godly living. That was a wrong interpretation of Jesus’ directions.

The world system in our day is largely secular and humanistic. Our cultural elites act as if there is no God. Life is explained apart from a divine Creator. The moral and ethical systems of these people are based upon personal autonomy, the idea that the individual is supreme. As long as other people are not hurt, the individual should have the right to do what he or she wants to do when he or she wants to do it. Thus the move in our state legislature to allow physician-assisted suicide is consistent with that ethic.

In Jesus' day, the world system was very religious. Jesus' strongest opponents were religious leaders who professed faith in the God of the Bible. So also today religious people can be caught up in a system of thinking that is not consistent with God and His Word.

The head of this world system, whether religious or secular, is the devil. In 1 John #5 v. 19 (1 JOHN 5:19), the Apostle John wrote, **"We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."** Later this evening Peter will profess his loyalty to Jesus and promise never to deny Him. He did deny Him within a few hours of making this claim. Later Peter would write (1 PETER 5:8) in his first epistle, **"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."** In v. 9 Peter tells his readers to resist the devil. So the point of application for us is that praying in Jesus' name includes praying for Christians to be kept from the Evil One.

5.

The fifth thing for which Jesus prays in this prayer is FOR CHRISTIANS TO EXPERIENCE SANCTIFICATION IN THE TRUTH. (JESUS HIGH... 5. FOR CHRISTIANS TO EXPERIENCE...) Verses 17-19: **"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth."** The remedy for dealing with a hostile world, for confronting an evil system led by Satan, who is called in the Bible a liar, is sanctification in the truth.

"Sanctify" is based on a Greek word group that means "to make holy." The Biblical idea of holiness is "to set apart for God." Christians in the New Testament are called "saints." The original Greek word literally means "holy ones." Being set apart to God means being like God in our words and thoughts and behavior. Thus Peter writes (1 PETER 1:15) in the first chapter of his first epistle, **"...but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct..."**

Jesus in His prayer is praying for this sanctification to involve the truth. Since the devil is described by Jesus in #8 as a liar, the battleground involving spiritual conflict will often involve truth. Can we really believe God's Word? (PROJECTOR OFF) The devil works at compromising us. He and his forces whisper to us that it is OK to cheat a little on our taxes. The government wastes a lot of our money anyway. It is OK to fudge the truth in other areas. There is nothing wrong with having sex outside of marriage. It is OK to put myself first. I don't have any obligation to help my neighbor in need. He is in need because of his own bad choices.

So the prayer here is for the followers of Jesus to believe and live the truth. Part of what is implied in that is that we study the truth. We have an obligation to read and study the Bible. The claim of the Bible is that it is truth.

6.

The sixth object of Jesus' prayer in our chapter is FOR CHRISTIANS TO EXPERIENCE UNITY. (PROJECTOR ON--- JESUS' HIGH... 6. FOR CHRISTIANS TO EXPERIENCE UNITY) We find that in vv. 20-23. Jesus writes in v. 20, **"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in the me through their word..."** So here we see that Jesus is seeking to apply these principles to Christians who will come after the generation of the apostles.

In vv. 21-23, Jesus says, **"...that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."**

This is a challenge that is difficult for us. We Christians have the Holy Spirit living within us, who gives us a certain unity with other Christians. But we Christians are still sinners, and we live in a world in which the Evil One is active and encouraging disunity. Unity can be a challenge in our family, in our local church and in the larger family of God.

To the best of my knowledge, we are blessed with a good spirit of unity in our congregation. We can't take that blessing for granted. We also have a connection beyond our local congregation. We are part of a conference of Baptist churches. Last Sunday evening, we had a visit from the leader of this conference. He described what is going on in our association and gave us opportunity to have input.

In our town we also have a fellowship of other evangelical churches. We pastors meet as a group once a month. My boys spend time with the kids of another pastor in town. His dad and I have lunch together occasionally. Another pastor in our community grew up in our congregation. So he has ties with various ones of us. His church and ours works together in the Good News Club, which has a Bible study program in our elementary school after school hours. Another pastor in town was in my office twice in the last week, talking about a particular issue involving our community. Don helps another church with music on Saturday evenings. That pastor brought him to a denominational conference in Phoenix a couple of

weeks ago so that he could benefit from seminars dealing with church leadership. Occasionally our evangelical fellowship of pastors jointly sponsors events. So I think that we do a fairly good job of promoting unity among evangelical churches in our town.

Beyond our local community, Christian unity is more challenging. The Center for the Study of Global Christianity says that there are 45,000 Christian denominations in the world. This group claims that there are an average of 24 denominations that begin every day. Some of these denominations say that they are the only legitimate church in the world. It makes it tough to have unity with such churches. More importantly, many denominations deny the basis of the faith and the trustworthiness of the Bible. Some of these want all of us who call ourselves Christians to do stuff together. But we who believe the Bible see that the New Testament warns us about being involved with false doctrine, especially in matters of the basics of the faith.

At the very least, and at a foundational level, we are responsible to pray for unity among Christians in our sphere of influence. This requires love and forgiveness.

Francis Schaeffer gives us this challenge: **“Here [in John 17:21] Jesus is stating something else which is much more cutting, much more profound: We cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus’ claims are true, and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians.”** (*Mark of the Christian*, p. 15) Thus praying in Jesus’ name includes praying for fellow Christians to experience unity.

7.

The last thing for which Jesus prays in #17 is FOR CHRISTIANS TO SEE GOD’S GLORY. (JESUS’ HIGH... 7. FOR CHRISTIANS TO SEE...) That is the subject in vv. 24-26: **“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”**

Jesus’ immediate concern and interest is these eleven disciples. He has been through much with them in the last couple of years. He realizes that they will face significant challenges in the coming years. He looks forward to the time when they will be with Him in heaven so that they can see His glory.

They have seen glimpses of this glory on earth. They have seen the seven miracles recorded by John in this Gospel. James and Peter and John were present with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration when they saw Jesus conversing with Moses and Elijah. They saw Jesus' face become radiant and His clothes become white. The disciples will soon see Jesus risen from the dead. They will see Him suddenly appear and disappear. They will see Him ascend into heaven.

We, too, see glimpses of the glory of God. We see it in the created world around us. Psalm 19 tells us, **"The heavens declare the glory of God."** We see it in our own salvation. Some of us have had dramatic conversions, and some of us have seen dramatic transformations of our lives. We see glimpses of this glory in answered prayers.

As I was approaching surgery a couple of months ago, I prayed that I might have the opportunity to share the gospel with some of the medical people whom I would be encountering. After I was home for a few days following surgery, my temperature spiked, and I went to the emergency room here in town. The doctor discovered that I had blood clots in both lungs. So the ER people called an ambulance to transport me to the hospital where I had my surgery. In the course of my ride, I dealt with a delightful paramedic whose name was Sam. In the course of my conversation, I mentioned that I was a Baptist pastor. He said that he was Jewish by background. He teaches a first aid course every year at a Baptist church near Nellis Air Force Base. He said that he intended each year after this teaching experience to read up about the difference between Baptists and other Christian religions. Could I explain the difference?

So I was strapped to this bed in the back of an ambulance with some tightness in my chest. But here was a great opportunity to share the gospel. Here was answered prayer and a little glimpse of heaven--- to be able to explain to a descendant of Abraham our understanding of the Messiah.

Jesus in our passage is praying in particular for the future certainty that His followers will be with Him and will be able to see His glory in heaven. The same Apostle John who was recording these words later wrote in 1 John #3 (1 JOHN 3:2), beginning in v. 2, **"Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (1 JOHN 3:3) And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."** The prospect of encountering this future glory should motivate us to follow Jesus. It should give us hope in the midst of an often hostile world. It should be a subject of prayer for our fellow Christians.

It is good and right for us to pray for particular needs of our fellow Christians. Those needs often involve health situations. Sometimes they involve the need for a job and relief from financial difficulties. The challenge that I find in this prayer from Jesus is to expand our horizons and to include in our prayers requests for these broader issues: For Jesus to be glorified in the situations of life, for Christians to have protection from the world, for Christians to have joy, for Christians to be kept from the Evil One, for Christians to experience sanctification in the truth, for Christians to experience unity, and for Christians to see God's glory.