

**Gospel Community as Witness
A Glorified and Sent Community
John 17; 20:19-23**

If I were to ask you in one on one conversation, “How is your prayer life?” how would you respond? Is prayer rather natural for you, or do you find it difficult to be disciplined to pray? It is a difficult spiritual discipline for me, probably because my mind so readily and easily wanders.

Next question about prayer. When you pray, what is the nature of your prayers? Are they mostly about you or do you pray for others? Would you say that your prayers are for the spiritual welfare of your soul and for the others for whom you pray, or do your prayers tend to be about health and finances and relationships and possessions?

I wonder if there is someone who tells you that he or she prays for you regularly? I was reading in our Bible at home a few weeks ago, and there was a card that Alison had used to mark her place in her reading of the NT. I must be one of the least observant people in the world, so I cannot tell you how many times I have moved that marker as I was reading. Recently, I noticed that she had a list of ways that she prays for me, especially in my sermon preparation. I asked Alison about it and she said that she prays in that way for me regularly. Discovering her prayer card touched me deeply. Her prayers for me are at a deep spiritual level and I am confident that you are beneficiaries of her prayers, just as I am. I know that many of you also pray for my sermon preparation – and, that is quite humbling. Thank you!

Do you ever consider that Jesus prays for you? He does so, regularly! Speaking of Jesus, the author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 7:25, “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.” Jesus is always praying for his flock, advocating for us. What do his prayers for us contain? Today’s text, John 17, will give us a good sense of his heart for us, as will John 20:19-23, in which Jesus, after his resurrection, commissions his disciples to carry on his work in his absence. John 17 is known as the great priestly prayer, because Jesus functions as the high priest who prays for us and who opens the way for us to approach the Father, directly. John 17 records a portion of what Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. Since it would be extremely difficult to isolate one part of the prayer and since all believers should read this prayer at least once a year, we will read all of it – but not while we are standing. John 20:19-23 will serve as our initial reading, then we will work our way through John 17 before drawing application. I pray that you will be greatly encouraged as we consider ourselves to be part of A Glorified and Sent Community. Would you please stand as I read John 20:19-23?

20:19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”
20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. **21** Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” **22** And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. **23** If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

When you think about Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane, if you had to describe his emotion with one word, what would it be? Most likely you would say “agony.” That is the way all three Synoptic Gospels portray Jesus’ prayer, even though they do not give much content beyond Jesus asking the Father, “If it be your will, let this cup pass

from me. Nevertheless, your will be done.” Luke tells us that Jesus’ sweat became like blood because of the intensity of his prayer.

When you read John 17, you do not sense the level of stress and agony that Matthew, Mark, and Luke portray on this night. What is the reality of that night? We must assume that both passionate prayer for his followers and intense anticipation of his sacrificial death filled his heart and mind so that agony and joy intermingled as he prayed to the Father on that night. Or, it could be that John prayed for his disciples first, then entered into the agonizing prayer that anticipated the cross.

You have experienced the extremes of prayer in one set time like this, haven’t you? Your heart overflows with love and concern for your children or your friend and then you remember the medical procedure next week – or, vice versa – and your heart is back and forth. There is no telling exactly how and when, on that night, that Jesus poured out his heart on our behalf, even in his agony, but the Holy Spirit led John to write Jesus’ prayer with this structure so that we may benefit from it, much like Jesus’ often prayed with others in mind, saying things like, “Father, I do not pray this for my benefit, but for those who are present.” In a sense, we are all present for Jesus’ great prayer of John 17. Let’s jump in. Verse 1:

17:1 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, 2 since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

Jesus knew that the time for his sacrifice for sin had come, and even though it caused him great agony, he did not approach it with resigned fatalism, but with a resoluteness that pointed to the purpose that had been in place before the world began. Since God had given Jesus authority over all flesh, it was difficult to

understand how the Father and Son would glorify one another through the sufferings of the cross, caused by wicked men. And, yet, no true believer would question the gloriousness in God's way of salvation for sinful men and women and boys and girls through the cross. What is the result of the cross? Eternal life for all that the Father has given to the Son. Verse 3:

3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

There are several important truths to touch on that are found in these three verses. First, eternal life from the Father comes to those who know and believe in the Son whom he sent. Jesus glorified the Father by completing the work God had given him. What work? As the Second Adam, Jesus lived a perfect life, getting right where Adam failed, and then he died a horrible death as a sacrifice for our sin as God's wrath was being poured out on him. That had not yet happened when Jesus prayed, but as we will see when Jesus speaks of our glorification, that which God has determined and promised has already been accomplished, in his mind, and, thus, in our relationship with him.

Because Jesus would willingly die as a substitute, he would then be ready to enjoy the reverse of the incarnation. Where before, Jesus had humbled himself and gave up some of the privileges that were rightly his as God, he now receives them back at the same level of glory that he had before he came to earth. In this prayer, Jesus' glorification is bound up with his crucifixion and death, and his burial, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus knew this and prayed that he would be restored to the glory he had before he entered the world. You will recall, in Revelation 1, that when the Apostle John

encountered the glorified Jesus, he fell on his face as though he were dead. You would have fallen on your face, also. John had been the closest to Jesus of all the disciples, and yet, he fell as one who was dead when he saw the glorified Christ. Verse 6:

6 “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. 7 Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you.

Jesus made the character of God known to the world, and when he acknowledged that the disciples had kept God’s word, he was referring to all that Jesus had said. Though they would not have understood Jesus’ teaching as the gospel, they would come to understand it as such. Did you know that Jesus is praying for you to know, believe, and keep the gospel? Verse 8:

8 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. 9 I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.

Remember last week how we understood from Jesus’ teaching that the world is divided into two groups – those who believe Jesus and those who do not? Most people today think that is a horrible distinction because it means that some go to heaven and some go to hell. Therefore, they refuse to acknowledge a difference. Most people believe karma over grace – you get what you deserve and what goes around comes around. Somehow, though, they rarely see themselves on the bad side of karma. Almost all people, in our day, think they will be okay in the end.

You may not be willing to make the distinction between saved and lost, but Jesus surely is. Verse 9 is quite sobering: “I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.” Wait – didn’t John 3:16 tell us that God loves the entire world! Absolutely! But, only those who believe will be saved. The Father sent Jesus to save some out of the world, and in the end, only those who are saved will have his favor. Thus, he distinguishes between believer and non-believer. Before you think that unfair, remember, you are dealing with God, who is both sovereign and good. Furthermore, rest and rejoice that Jesus is praying for you! His prayer is for us, as the unified and loving church, to reveal him to a lost and need world. Verses 10-16:

10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. 11 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. 12 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. 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. 14 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. 15 I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

Just think of the blessings that Jesus prays for us! Eternal security in the Father’s name and in Jesus’ protection. Unity in the body – a unity that mirrors the unity of the Trinity, for goodness sake! Jesus’ joy in us, regardless of our circumstances. A union with Christ that sustains us in persecution. Protection against the destroyer of men

and women, who is the enemy of our souls – Satan. All of this leads to the prayer for sanctification. Verse 17:

17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

How can we fare so well in a world that is utterly – and, sometimes violently – opposed to the gospel, to the notion that Jesus is the only way of salvation? Through sanctification, which is a multi-faceted truth. We are set apart from the world by the Holy Spirit and marked as God’s own. We are set apart and marked for eternal life through Jesus. We are set apart from the world and commissioned to live holy lives. That is sanctification, or at least the facets Jesus prays for in our lives, here. How does God accomplish this sanctification? Through the Holy Spirit, of course, and through his word. Through Scripture.

Do you want to be more like Jesus? He has prayed that you would be, and he has asked the Father to sanctify you through his word. I acknowledged at the beginning of the message that prayer is difficult for me. That does not mean I think it is unimportant or that I do not persist in praying more. I do! God makes it crystal clear that consistent prayer is vital to our relationship with the Father. How do I know that? Because Scripture tells me so. Some would say, “I love to pray and listen to the Spirit, but I find reading the Bible difficult.” But Scripture and the Holy Spirit are inseparable. Jesus prayed that you would be set apart and that you would grow spiritually – through Scripture. He died so that it would happen. And, according to verse 20, he was praying specifically for you, not just his disciples:

20 “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 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.

Wait a minute! What did Jesus ask? May my followers be one and be in us just as we are in one another? What does Jesus mean? We know that he does not mean that we will become divine, which is, when you think about it, absurd. Either you are divine all along or you are not, and as you know, we are not divine. We are, however, united to the Godhead in a remarkable act of God's grace, and as Jesus has said before, he now prays that the church will live in unity so that the world will know that the Savior can only come from above. How profound is this love, this union we have with Christ? His deep desire is that we dwell with him in eternity. Verse 22:

22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 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. 24 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. 25 O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. 26 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."

Maybe nowhere in Scripture do we find such simple, yet, profound, truth than we find in the Gospel of John. Simply profound or profoundly simple. That is why the three points of application that I want to make are quite simple, yet profound, as we contemplate Jesus' prayer for us, beginning with:

1. A Prayer That We Will Know the Father's Love

Do you think God loves you because of qualities that you possess and that you bring to the table? Well, if we had anything to put on the table, that might be up for debate. But Scripture makes it clear that we are hopelessly lost and unable to offer anything of worth to the Lord that would cause him to accept us into heaven. When you recognize that the Creator of the universe loves you, not out of any goodness within you, but simply because he chooses to – well, that will change the way you perceive yourself in God’s eyes.

To understand the extent of God’s love for you, you must understand the Father’s love for the Son. It was, and is, perfect. There has never been a glitch, never an awkward moment, never a misunderstanding, only perfect divine love. The only exception, of course, was when Jesus assumed your sin and the Father poured out his wrath on the Son. Instead of you. That is how much he loves you and Jesus’ prayer was that you know this love – intellectually, experientially, psychologically – in every way. Second, Jesus offered:

2. A Prayer That We Will Live in the Hope We Have in Jesus

Jesus spoke of his own glory and of our glory. If we have repented of our sins and have trusted Jesus’ death, we have been justified – or, God has declared us to be righteous. We have been justified and we are presently being sanctified, or, gradually being changed more and more into the image of Christ. One day, we will be glorified when we stand before Jesus, face to face. Our glorification is accomplished by God making us worthy to stand in his presence, and we cannot fathom what it will be like. It is future, yet it is so certain that the NT speaks of our glorification as if it has already happened. Jesus said, “The glory that you have given me I have given to them.” Why? “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.”

God has put us in a community that should so reflect his love that the world will see God’s glory. In our community, we should notice the work of the Holy Spirit in our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. We should be patient and loving toward one another, forgiving one another even as we are forgiven in Christ. In his book, *The Weight of Glory*, C.S. Lewis wrote, quote: “It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare.” Close quote.

To live in consideration of our future glorification is to live as those whose lives are marked with hope – not hope that this life will get better, but the sure and certain hope that we will be with Jesus for all eternity. That should change the way you live. That is Jesus’ prayer for you, as is this last focus:

3. A Prayer and a Commission to Share the Gospel with the World

As we read from John 20, after Jesus’ resurrection when he appeared to his disciples he said, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” Jesus’ work of calling people out of the world to himself continues to this day. He has called us into gospel community so that our love for one another will attract those who do not know Jesus as he calls them into the community of believers that he loves with a love that cannot be contained, but must be shared.

If our mission is like our Lord's, then all the things that Jesus taught his disciples at the end of his ministry will be true for us. Jesus loved the world and called some to follow him. So, must we love those in the world and call them to repentance and faith in Jesus. The world hated Jesus, some will hate us, or, rather, they will hate Jesus and take it out on us. The end of Jesus' ministry contained a cross and resurrection. Jesus' followers are called to die to themselves every day, taking up their crosses and following him in resurrection power. Through all of this, the gospel community of believers is brought deeper and deeper into the love of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The more we love God, the more we will love the community in which he has placed us. And the more we love one another, the more our hearts will yearn for Jesus' mission to be pursued on this earth, sharing the good news that Jesus saves those who believe. Our joy is like the Savior's joy when someone is saved out of the world and given a place in Jesus' community – in the church. Gospel community as witness. Let's pray.