

August 13th, 2017

# HOLY FATHER, KEEP THEM IN YOUR NAME

John 17:11-12

One of the evidences of the truthfulness of Scripture is the fact that Scripture does not embellish the lives of even it's most important characters. The disciples were losers. They were not cultural shapers, nor were they successful businessmen. In fact, **Acts 4:13** says that everyone could see "...that they were uneducated, common men."<sup>1</sup> If you were picking an all-star line up to come and speak at a conference, you would never pick these men. These were sub-ordinary men, in a sub-ordinary culture who were slaves to Rome. Peter, Andrew, James and John were plain fishermen (**Matthew 4:18-21**). Simon the Zealot was a political malcontent which means he was hated by Rome;<sup>2</sup> while Matthew was a turn-coat tax-collector which means he was hated by the Jews.

But if we look closely at their character, it just gets worse. Peter was rash and impulsive, on a number of occasions trying to grab the steering wheel from Jesus (**Matthew 16:21-23; John 13:36-38; Luke 9:28-36**). In **Matthew 16:23**, Jesus calls him Satan. Thomas is remembered for his skepticism (**John 20:25**) so that even after 2,000 years most people have heard the phrase "doubting Thomas." John and his brother James, the "sons of thunder", were willing to burn up a whole village of Samaritans because they didn't receive Jesus (**Luke 9:51-56**) Phillip was spiritually dense (**John 14:8-11**). Thaddeus failed to grasp the significance of Jesus' first coming (**John 14:22**). All of them were power-hungry party-spirited men (**Mark 9:38-41; 10:35-45**). All of them were self-righteous men who thought of themselves higher than others (**Mark 9:33-37**). Yet when the time came for their greatness to be put to the test, they were all cowards fleeing the scene at Jesus' arrest (**John 16:32**) John Mark was so

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<sup>1</sup> They didn't have much in terms of resources or wealth—that disappeared when they began following Christ (**Mark 10:28**).

<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: John 12-21* (Chicago, IL.,: Moody Publishers, 2008), pg. 274

desperate to get away that when the soldiers grabbed him by his linen cloth, he slipped out of it and ran away naked (**Mark 14:51-52**). They were not super saints. At the hour of Jesus' greatness need in the garden, when He specifically asked them to pray for Him, they fell asleep (**Luke 22:46**).<sup>3</sup> The disciples were losers.<sup>4</sup>

Dear congregation, do you ever wonder why Jesus chose men like this and then displayed all their faults? Because this is you. You are a loser—spiritually speaking. You don't have the right stuff. You didn't have the right stuff to get into the kingdom of God, and you don't have the right stuff to keep yourself in the kingdom of God. **There are conditions that must be met in order enter into heaven.** 'Right Pastor Josh, you must believe the gospel.' That is the condition you must meet in order to be justified. We are justified by faith alone. Faith alone in the finished work of Christ alone is the condition we must meet in order to have all our sins forgiven, and to be given the righteousness of Christ.

But there are more conditions that you must meet in order to enter into heaven. We are saved by faith alone, *but* that faith is never alone. As one author says

“from James 2:26 (we know ) that there is such a thing as *dead* faith; and from James 2:19 that there is such a thing as *demonic* faith; and from 1 Corinthians 15:2 that it is possible to believe *in vain*; and from Luke 8:13 that one can “believe for a while, and in time of testing *fall away*;”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Much help in this section came from John MacArthur's *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: John 12-21* (Chicago, IL.: Moody Publishers, 2008), pg. 274-275

<sup>4</sup> And their record after Jesus' ascension was not much better. Though they preached the gospel in Jerusalem, they refused to go Samaria and to the end of the earth as Jesus commanded (**Acts 1:8**) until persecution forced them out (**Acts 8:1**). And then again we see Peter arguing with the Lord in **Acts 10:14**, this time over bringing the gospel to an unclean Gentile named Cornelius. After learning this lesson once, he had to learn it again in Antioch when Paul rebuked him publicly for separating himself from the Gentile believers (**Galatians 2:11-14**). And then there is the ugly division between Paul and Barnabas (**Acts 15:36-41**)

<sup>5</sup> John Piper from his introduction to Thomas Schreiner's *Sola Fide* found here <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/justintaylor/2015/09/15/john-pipers-foreword-to-tom-schreiners-new-book-on-justification-by-faith-alone/> accessed August 12, 2017

A true faith is one where you have been united to Jesus Christ, and this is evidenced by being made more and more like Him. This is why Jesus prays the way that He does. In v.17 He prays “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” A true faith is one that longs to obey Christ.

Jesus said “If you love me, *you will keep* my commandments” (**John 14:15**).

And this obedience is one that works by love. **Galatians 5:6** “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith *working through love*.”

And this obedience of faith is the aim of gospel preaching. **Romans 1:5** “[this Jesus] through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about *the obedience of faith* for the sake of his name”

Your obedience is *not* the reason you are justified; but it is a necessary fruit of your justification. So how are you going to pull this off? How will you continue to love and obey God when life falls apart on you? When your spouse leaves you? When, God forbid, your child dies? How will you walk in the obedience of faith when true persecution comes? When the gospel and the Bible are outlawed? Or, how will you continue to follow Christ when the monotony of life finally catches up with you, and you feel like you are who Ecclesiastes is talking about “All is vanity and a striving after the wind” (**Ecclesiastes 1:14**) How will you obey when even obedience looks pointless?

How did the disciples make it? They made it because Jesus didn’t leave their eternal welfare in their own hands. He prays in v.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*.” And they continued to persevere even after Jesus left because He committed them to His Father. v.11 “Holy Father, *keep them in your name*, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.” This

prayer is the only reason why any Christian gets to heaven. Jesus does not save you and then leave the rest up to you. God's grace is not a can of spiritual red bull that gives you wings and then requires you to fly the rest of the way to heaven. Jesus Christ is both the author and finisher of our faith (**Hebrews 12:2**) The apostle says "I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." (**Philippians 1:6**)

### *The Big Idea...*

Every true believer is invincibly kept by the Father, such that they can never be lost

- ☆ The Keeping of the Father
- ☆ The Keeping of the Son

## I. The Keeping of the Father

### **The purpose of Jesus' prayer**

Let's look at **v.11**. Jesus prays "And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you." The first part of this verse may seem insignificant, but it is actually very significant. It answers the question: 'Jesus, why are you praying?' 'I'm praying *because* I am leaving the disciples. They are already full of sorrow. (**John 16:6**). They are not going to see me anymore and it will be the most difficult, soul crushing experience of their lives.' That's what **v.11** is saying "I am no longer in the world—because I'm going to the cross and I will finish my work in the resurrection and then ascend to heaven—but they will remain. They will feel alone They will feel like all is lost."

Beloved, Jesus takes note of your sorrow. He's not a cold hearted Savior who is only interested in notching His belt with the souls that He's saving. "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (**Hebrews 4:15**) He knows what his disciples were feeling. He knows what you are feeling.<sup>6</sup> That is why He is praying out loud. Jesus is not praying out loud because Father needs to be informed of something. Jesus is not praying out loud to try and convince Father of something. He's praying out loud to convince you of His infinite concern for you. He sees your tears. The Psalmist says "You have taken account of my wanderings; [You] put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?" (**Psalm 56:8**)

Therefore, why is Jesus praying? Because His disciples were about to be alone.<sup>7</sup> Why is Jesus praying out loud? Because He wants us to know that no matter what hell we face down here on earth, He keeps His loving eye on us, and is praying for our relief.

### **"The "what" of this keeping<sup>8</sup>**

Let's look at what Jesus prays. This is the first petition that Jesus makes for the disciples. He prays in v.11 "Holy Father, *keep them in your name*, which you have given me." Believer, the reason why you will not ever lose your salvation is because God the Father is keeping you. That's what Jesus prayed.

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<sup>6</sup> Calvin says here "It yields no small consolation to us, when we learn that the Son of God becomes so much the more earnest about the salvation of his people, when he leaves them as to his bodily presence; for we ought to conclude from it, that, while we are laboring under difficulties in the world, he keeps his eye on us, to send down, from his heavenly glory, relief from our distresses." John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XVIII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 174

<sup>7</sup> "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13:1)

<sup>8</sup> "That keeping means everything. Keeping from falling away, from evil doctrines, from being overcome by sorrow, or in tribulation and suffering, keeping them in life and in death. From this first petition of our Lord's prayer we learn the absolute security of a true believer. If a believer, one who belongs to Christ, who has been given by the Father to the Son, for whom the Son of God intercedes, can be lost, it would mean the loss of Christ's glory, the loss of a part of the travail of His soul."—A.C. Gaebelien quoted in John MacArthur's *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: John 12-21* (Chicago, IL.: Moody Publishers, 2008), pg. 277

Jesus didn't pray 'Father, help them to get their act together, so that You could accept them.' No! Jesus prayed "Holy Father, *keep them.*" No believer can ever be lost. Not because believers have been magically transformed into sinless super saints. The disciples debunk that myth. No, believers cannot be lost because we are kept by the Father. R.C. Sproul provides a helpful illustration

"Imagine a father walking beside a railroad track with his three-year-old son. There is danger at hand, so the father holds the child's hand. If the boy's safety depends on the strength of *his* grasp on his father's hand, he is in grave danger—he could lose his grip and wander into the path of a train. What keeps the child from destruction is not the boy's grip on his father's hand but the father's grip on the child's hand."<sup>9</sup>

Dear congregation, your salvation does not depend on how tightly you hold to the Father. If it did, you would have already lost it. You've sinned too many times. You've returned to bad habits too many times. You've failed to pray and read your Bible too many times. You've not loved others too many times. You're constantly losing your grip. You're constantly blowing it. That's what being a Christian is—it's recognizing that you are sick and in need of the Great Physician (**Mark 2:17**). It's recognizing that you are poor in Spirit and you have nothing to offer God (**Matthew 5:3**) It's recognizing that all of your assets are but liabilities before God (**Phil. 3:7**)

No, the only reason why you are still a Christian is because the Father is keeping you.<sup>10</sup> If your salvation depended on your grip, your performance, your holy living, you would lose before this sermon is over.

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<sup>9</sup> R.C. Sproul, *St. Andrew's Expository Commentary: John*, (Orlando, FL.: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2009), pg. 324

<sup>10</sup> They, whom God has accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved. This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, the abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which arises also the certainty and infallibility thereof. WCF XVII.1-2

## The “how” of this keeping

Let’s look at v.11 again, because I really wrestled with this phrase. Jesus prayed “Holy Father, keep them in your name.” Why didn’t He pray “Keep them *by your power?*” Why “Keep them *in your name?*”<sup>11</sup> I think the first clue to answering that is by considering the progression of this phrase throughout this prayer.

v.6 “I have manifested *your name* to the people whom you gave me out of the world.”

v.11 “Holy Father, keep them in *your name*, which you have given me,”

v.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.”

This is so instructive. Making God’s name known structures the beginning, the middle, and the end of Jesus’ prayer. Why? Because *God’s name* consists of the beginning, the middle, and the end of the Christian life. To know God’s name isn’t about identifying what He’s called by. To know God’s name is to have tasted and seen that He is good (**Psalm 34:8**). This is *how* God keeps us—by holding us captive to glory.<sup>12</sup> That’s the difference between a false convert and a true Christian. A false convert will stick around *for a while*, as long as this Jesus thing is meeting his felt needs. But a true believer is held captive all his

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<sup>11</sup> Here D.A. Carson asks the question on whether this phrase is meant to be instrumental —“keep them through you name” or locative—“keep them in your name.” For that discussion, I would commend you to his commentary. D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company), pg. 562-563

<sup>12</sup> When God declared His name known to Moses, how did He do it? “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.” (**Exodus 34:6-7**)

life by the beauty and excellency of Jesus Christ.<sup>13</sup> When you have seen that you are a desperate sinner, but that Jesus is a friend to sinners (**Mark 7:34**). When you have seen that you deserved to be cursed by God, but that Jesus became a curse for you (**Gal. 3:13**). When you have seen that you deserve to be damned by God, but that Jesus was damned for you (**Matthew 27:46**). When you see Jesus like that, *you are being kept in the Father's name*.

### **The purpose of being kept: “that they may be one”**

As Jesus prays for the Father to keep the disciples, He has a specific *aim* in mind. He prays in v.11 Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, *that they may be one*, even as we are one.”<sup>14</sup> In other words “their unity is the purpose of being kept.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For a primer on this, look at the introduction to John Piper’s *A Peculiar Glory: How the Christian Scriptures Reveal Their Complete Truthfulness*, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2016), pg. 11-18 “Faith is not a heroic step through the door of the unknown, it is a humble, happy sight of God’s self-authenticating glory.”

<sup>14</sup> Again, Jesus has a very curious way of praying. Why didn’t He pray “Keep them in your name...*that they may be saved*” Why did He pray “Keep them in your name...*that they may be one*?” The logic is similar to what Paul says in **Galatians 5:14** [Please turn there] “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Did Paul make a mistake? Shouldn’t it read “The whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength?” Isn’t loving God a more supreme thing than loving your neighbor? Yes. But loving your neighbor is the test of whether you really love God or not. Paul Tripp says in this place “[The Apostle Paul] knows that *only people* who love God above all else *will ever* love their neighbor as themselves. It is only when God is in the rightful place in my heart that you will be in the appropriate place in my life.” [Paul David Tripp, *New Morning Mercies: A Daily Gospel Devotional*, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2014), August 9] Do you see? When he says the law is summed up in loving your neighbor, He knows this is only possible if God has already taken the first place in your heart. And I believe that Jesus is using the same type of logic here in John 17. He doesn’t need to pray “Keep them in your name...*that they may be saved*” because in praying “Keep them in your name...*that they may be one*,” He includes salvation. Jesus is praying for the fruit of Christian unity.

<sup>15</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Company), pg. 562



There are many in our day who have used this verse to justify the ecumenical movement.<sup>16</sup> That what Jesus wants is “every church [to be] united as one, with no divisions in the body of Christ.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, they would argue, this prayer is not being answered right now, because of all the disunity that we see. Now we are going to see a fuller unpacking of this in v.21-23, but let me just say here two brief things. **1) Unity is already present reality.**<sup>18</sup> Everybody who is born again has been united to Jesus Christ, and therefore to every other believer on the planet.<sup>19</sup> **2) Unity is never at the expense of truth.** Unity cannot be achieved in a way that ignores how Jesus prays. In v.17, He prays “Sanctify them in *the truth*; your word is *truth*.” There cannot be unity apart from truth because “persistence in the truth is the prerequisite [for growing in Christ]”<sup>20</sup>

## Summary

Jesus prayed that the Father would keep the disciples. That their salvation would not hang on the grip of their own spiritual strength. Let’s look now at how Jesus kept the disciples.

## II. The Keeping of the Son

### Not one has been lost

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<sup>16</sup> “Christ’s payer for unity has often been used as an argument for church union irrespective of doctrine and practices.” *The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible*, Ed. Joel Beeke, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014) pg. 1545

<sup>17</sup> R.C. Sproul, *St. Andrew’s Expository Commentary: John*, (Orlando, FL.,: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2009), pg. 324

<sup>18</sup> If there is not a measure of true unity between believers, then the Father has failed in keeping us. Being kept by God necessarily produces unity. This is why we ache and long and pray for persecuted believers that we have never met. Because we have truly been united to them.

<sup>19</sup> That’s why Jesus says at the end of v.11 “even as we are one.”

<sup>20</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Company), pg. 563

Jesus says in v.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.” Jesus had already said something similar in **John 6:39** “And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.” The emphasis here is *not* that salvation is automatic after one believes, but rather that Jesus carefully guards and keeps all whom the Father gives Him.

The mistake that we can make in our thinking is that the sins of unbelievers and the sins of believers are totally different types of sins. And therefore, because we sin differently, we are somehow in a better position to finally be saved. But this is categorically false. Sometimes the sins of believers are worse than the sins of unbelievers.<sup>21</sup> Paul says of the man who was sleeping with his father’s wife that this sin was of a kind that was “...not tolerated even among pagans” (**1 Corinthians 5:1**).

I would argue that Peter’s sin of denying Christ was nearly identical to Judas’s sin. But Peter wasn’t lost *because* Jesus guarded him. **Luke 21:31-32** “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.” Similarly, all the disciples were going to miserably fail Christ. We saw this from the last chapter. **John 16:32** “Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone.” They all deserted Christ in his most desperate hour. They were not finally saved because *they didn’t fail*. They were finally saved because Jesus guarded them. Looking ahead to the garden scene, Jesus says to the soldiers who were arresting Him “‘...if you seek me, let these men go.’ This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: Of those you gave me I have lost not one.” (**John 18:8-9**)

### Except the Son of Destruction

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<sup>21</sup> Romans 2:1 “Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.”

So what do we do with the rest of v.12? Jesus prayed “I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost *except the son of destruction*, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.” Now Jesus is talking about Judas here. On the surface, the grammar can make it sound like Jesus lost Judas though He was one of the ones the Father gave Him. But that is not what is happening. Jesus never lost Judas, because Judas was never given to him. Judas was never born again. Judas was not elect. Jesus has made this clear from the beginning. In **John 6:70-71** Jesus said “Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.” He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him.” Likewise in **John 13:18** Jesus said “I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’”

Judas was a son of destruction. This is a Jewish idiom which means “a man who is ruined or devoted to destruction.”<sup>22</sup> And his ruin did not just begin at his betrayal of Jesus, his ruin was predicted and planned from before the beginning of time. That is why Jesus said in v.12 “that the Scripture might be fulfilled.” Psalm 41:9, 55:12-14; 109<sup>23</sup> all explicitly point to the actions of Judas and his betrayal of Christ centuries before he was ever born.

Judas was a reprobate, meaning that he was a vessel fit for destruction before the foundation of the world. The Westminster Confession of Faith says it like this

“By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death.”<sup>24</sup>

But we must avoid two gross errors when speaking about reprobation. **The first error** is in placing blame on God for anyone’s ruin, as if Judas was placed under

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<sup>22</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XVIII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 176

<sup>23</sup> Also see Zechariah 11:12-13

<sup>24</sup> WCF III.III

a physical constraint—forced to work against his own will. Judas knew what he was doing when he betrayed Christ, and he did it in accord with his own will. Jesus told him in **John 13:27** “What *you* are going to do, do quickly.” And after Judas betrayed Christ, he felt the weight of his own blameworthiness. We read in Matthew 27:3-4 “Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, *he changed his mind* and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, “*I have sinned* by betraying innocent blood.” Judas knew that the only one to blame was himself. The same thing was true of Pharaoh in the OT. Scripture indeed says that God hardened his heart, yet Pharaoh testified against himself. He said in **Exodus 9:27** “This time I have sinned; the Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong.” Nobody will ever be able to bring a single charge against God for their own damnation.

**The second error** is in thinking that God is merely predicting events in the future, and that He is not actively ordaining all things. Scripture makes it clear that even the foreordaining of the reprobate was part of God’s eternal plan.

**1 Peter 2:8** They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were *destined* to do.

**2 Peter 2:3** Their condemnation from *long ago* is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

**Jude 4** For certain people have crept in unnoticed who *long ago were designated* for this condemnation,<sup>25</sup>

God is not merely predicting events. God is the Lord “who works all things according to the counsel of his will,” (**Ephesians 1:11**) God is sovereign. He does not need to get permission from you or me or anyone else on planet earth to ask how He should rule this universe. We don’t give God authority. We don’t

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<sup>25</sup> Also see Romans 9:22-23; Joshua 11:18-20; Proverbs 16:4; 2 Timothy 2:20; Matthew 7:23; 2 Peter 3:7

give God permission. He is God. Virginian Stem Owens once wrote in the Reformed Journal.

“Let’s get this one thing straight. God can do anything he damn well pleases, including damn well. And if it pleases him to damn, then it is done, ipso facto, well. God’s activity is what it is. There isn’t anything else. Without it there would be no being, including human beings presuming to judge the Creator of everything that is.”<sup>26</sup>

Those are the two errors we must avoid when we are speaking about reprobation. Anyone who is finally lost and goes to hell are themselves blameworthy. They refused to repent. They refused to turn to the Living God. And at the same time, God foreordained their destruction. God did not create fresh evil in their hearts to do so. He simply withheld the grace that He was not obligated to give.

### **Why tell us this?**

Why tell us this? Why was this important for the disciples to hear? Why is this important for us to hear? The first answer is that both election and reprobation are doctrines that Jesus intends for our joy. That is what v.13 says. But now I am coming to you, and *these things* I speak in the world, [*the things that he just spoke about*] that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. God-willing we’ll see how that works next week. The second answer for why this was important for the disciples and us to hear is because what Judas was doing looked at the time like He was destroying God’s plan for redeeming Israel. From a human perspective, when Jesus was arrested, it looked like Judas had destroyed the hopes of the Messiah. But the reality is, that Judas was part of God’s predetermined plan to bring salvation to all of God’s elect. So when Jesus is praying here, it’s like He’s saying ‘I’ve not lost control. Father I have kept every one of the precious little lambs that you have given me. The Son of

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted from John Piper’s sermon *Holy, Holy, Holy, Is The Lord Of Hosts*, source: <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/holy-holy-holy-is-the-lord-of-hosts> accessed August 13, 2017

destruction alone has been lost. But his betrayal is the fulfillment of my Word. He betrayed me, so that I could lay down my life for all the elect of God.’

## Application

Our Doctrine: Grace is totally sufficient not merely necessary

This year marks the 500th year anniversary of the Reformation, and central to the Protestants dispute with Rome was the idea that salvation is by grace. But what may surprise you is that Rome’s view is more nuanced than you think. Years before the Reformation even began Martin Luther lectured on the Bible at the University of Wittenburg. As a Roman Catholic, he taught that

“Salvation is by grace, not because of our merits, he explained. Salvation is given out of the pure mercy of the promising God. No alarms went off, not a single eyebrow was raised by all the inquisitors in Rome. And why not? Because Martin Luther the monk was still upholding Rome’s own theology.”<sup>27</sup>

It is a gross oversimplification to look back and say that Protestants believed that we are saved by grace and Rome says we are saved by works. Rome believed in grace. They believed that grace was *necessary* and that without it you can not be saved. To use an illustration they believed that grace was like a can of spiritual red bull. It brings you to life, and gives you spiritual energy, to live the Christian life. They believed that God’s grace is what builds the foundations of the Christian life, and is what enables you to live the Christian life. Nowhere did Rome say that one could be saved apart from grace.

But the difference between Rome and the Protestants is that little five letter word “alone.” Listen to how Martin Luther as a Catholic wrestled with his salvation.

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<sup>27</sup> Michael Reeves & Tim Chester, *Why the Reformation Still Matters*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2016), Audiobook, Ch. 4

“I was a good monk, and kept my orders so strictly, that if ever a monk could get to heaven through monastic discipline, I should have entered in. All my companions in the monastery who knew me would bare me out in this. For if it would have gone on much longer, I would have martyred myself to death—what with vigils, prayers, readings and other works. And yet my conscience would not give me certainty. But I always doubted and said “You didn’t do that right. You weren’t contrite enough. You left that out of your confession. The more I tried to remedy an uncertain weak and troubled conscience with human traditions, the more daily I found it more uncertain, weaker and more troubled.”<sup>28</sup>

Luther had a problem. He knew that God was an absolutely holy God and that God could see his imperfections. So that he was given grace by God did not help his conscience. It wasn’t until Luther discovered that God’s grace wasn’t merely necessary but sufficient. There is a world of difference between necessary and sufficient. You could say that the Reformation started because of the difference between necessary and sufficient. Oxygen is necessary for fire to burn. Without it no fire. But oxygen is not sufficient for fire to burn. And thank God, because we would all be on fire. That’s the difference between Rome’s view and the Protestants.

Rome believed that without grace we cannot be saved. Grace is necessary  
 Protestants believed that with grace we will be saved. Grace is sufficient

Rome teaches that God’s grace enables people to win salvation. Protestants teach that grace wins people salvation.

Dear congregation, I think that I’m Roman Catholic 50% of the time. I know that grace is necessary, but I often doubt that it is sufficient. How did I do this week? Did I measure up? Were my performances good enough? This is why Jesus prayed the way He prayed. “Holy Father, keep them in your name...I

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid*

kept them...I guarded them, and not one of them has been lost...[now Father, you keep them].

Beloved let that settle in your troubled heart. The grace of God is not merely necessary. It is sufficient. It is enough. Ease your troubled conscience. You didn't do enough this week. Your performances weren't good enough. You failed. Yes, it is true, that your faith must produce good works. Yes it is true that your heart must be transformed, and that without holiness you will not see the Lord. None of that has changed. And that is what God's grace will work in you as a believer. Being a believer means that the Father is keeping you and meeting all conditions in you necessary to obtain heaven. Rest in that.

If you're not a believer, I "...would implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (1 Corinthians 5:20). Jesus sent this word to be preached in order that the lost could be saved. If He is not your Savior, your lot is cast with Judas, you are a son of destruction. How terrible your heart must feel. How fearful your conscience must be. Don't you want a loving Father who will keep you and guard you and protect you? Flee to Jesus Christ. He is a friend of sinners. Trust in Him. He said "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." (**John 5:24**) He is the only way to life. He is life.

### Our Duty: (There is no duty)

I felt a strong urge to fabricate a duty for this passage this week. But there is none in the text, and even if I would have even inferred one, I feel like I would have totally undermined what Jesus is praying.

### Our Delight: We are kept for God

The language of v.11 needs to be pressed one more time. Jesus prayed in v.11 "Holy Father, keep them in your name," The question is "keep for what?" When you keep something, your holding onto it for a purpose. Money is kept



for a rainy day. Pictures are kept for memories. What does God *keep* us for? He keeps us to bring us to Himself. “And this is eternal life that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (v.3) God does not keep you, just so you could be prevented from going to hell. The prize of eternal life is not merely having your sins forgiven, or possessing a mansion in heaven or in having streets paved with gold.<sup>29</sup> Where do those streets of gold lead to? The throne of God. Everything that God does to keep us persevering to the end are all means to bring us to Himself. He is the great prize of the gospel. **1 Peter 3:18** “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God,” **John 14:3** “...if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

That’s why this prayer of Jesus is so precious. He prays that we would be invincibly kept for God.

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<sup>29</sup> Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer For Christians: Learning to See the Glories of God’s Love*, (Focus Publishing, 2008), pg. 49