

John 17:6-19
(Psalm 1; Colossians 1:3-4; 9-14)
“Sanctify Them in the Truth”

Introduction

We come to the middle passages of this great prayer, Jesus’ final words before his arrest, passion and crucifixion. He has said all that he had to say to the world, and turned to speak his final words to his disciples (John 13-16). Now in chapter 17, he ends his ministry in prayer: first he prays for himself (17:1-5), then he prays for the disciples with him in the upper room who have shared in his life and ministry for the past three years (17:6-19), and finally, he prays for those of us down through the ages who have believed in him because of the testimony of the disciples gathered round him in the room (17:20-26).

What strikes me is Jesus’ deep sense of accountability to his heavenly Father for what the Father has entrusted to him. Thus he recites his understanding of his ministry to his disciples, and on the basis of that asks great things of God for them. I am convicted to ask myself whether I am as aware of those whom the Lord has entrusted to me, whether I can recite with honesty the ministry I have borne to them, and whether it is in confidence of having sought to be faithful in small things that I dare ask the Father of great things for them.

This morning I invite you to join me in turning this central passage of Jesus’ final prayer into a means of examining ourselves, our own lives and ministries, and in asking ourselves whether we are aware of the people entrusted to each of us, whether we realize it or not, whether we are believers or not, for every substantial personal relationship of life is a trust given us and required of us. C.S. Lewis put it this way in his sermon entitled “The Weight of Glory”:

It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbor. ... 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 corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. ... There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked with a mere mortal.

Jesus took people so very seriously, as created in the image of his Father, as potentially destined for glory, as desperately lost but objects of a grace that is greater than our sin. Let his prayer search your heart this morning and show you what God desires of your relationship with those he has entrusted to you.

Body

1. Whom has the Lord entrusted to you?

Jesus was very clear in understanding and stating that God the Father had entrusted his disciples to him, and that he was therefore responsible to God for how he nurtured, taught, encouraged and protected them.

He speaks of them as those the Father had given him out of the world (17:6,9).

He speaks of them as those destined to share in his glory and his joy (17:10,13).

2. What have you done to help them toward joyful maturity?

Jesus enumerates in this prayer three of the ways that he has kept trust with God in leading these disciples toward maturity:

He has kept them and guarded them (17:12).

He has given them the word of God (17:8,14).

Jesus has sanctified himself that they may be sanctified (17:19).

3. What do you pray for them?

Jesus asks three things of the Father for his disciples:

He asks the Father to keep them in his name (17:11).

He asks the Father to keep them from the evil one (17:15).

He asks the Father to sanctify them in the truth [= God's word] (17:17).

Conclusion

Jesus' life and ministry was directed toward his Father's glory and the good of those his Father had entrusted to him. His dreams, desires, prayers and labors – finally his death and resurrection – all were directed toward these great ends. Do we have that same overwhelming sense of the eternal seriousness of what has been entrusted to us? Whom has the father given you, and how are you living and praying for them?

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