

Were You There When He Prayed?

Text: John 17:1-26

In the weeks leading up to Easter we are focusing on some of the major events surrounding the last week in the life of Christ.

We, in a sense are stepping into the events to experience a little of the drama, and how it affects us.

Some of the events are taken out of chronological order...to better fit the Sundays before Easter.

Last week we looked at the betrayal of Jesus by a trusted close companion...
Someone who had traveled with Jesus and sat under his ministry for 3 years.

Today the focus is on Jesus 'High Priestly' prayer.

John 17 isn't "normal" Scripture reading.

It's sitting in on a very personal prayer that Jesus is praying.

And it is an incredible privilege.

We learn much about Jesus sense of mission, his passion, and his deep desire that God's purposes be served.

We learn about Jesus as a man of prayer, and we learn about his concern for the work of the Father.

It is a wonderful comfort and privilege to hear the words from someone saying they are praying for you.

I know that when people tell me that...I feel a little awkward, but greatly encouraged. It is even more encouraging when you *hear* them praying for you.

But what if it is Jesus who is praying for you...how would you feel then!

This prayer can be neatly divided into three sections.

verses 1 to 5, where Jesus prays concerning himself;

the key word in these verses is '**glory**'

verses 6 to 19, where he prays for his followers;

the key word is '**kept**' (Preserved).

and **verses 20 to 26**, where he prays for all believers.

The key word is '**one**'.

The NIV translation puts in those three headings.

Well, that's helpful, as long as we added understanding.

That although verses 6-19 deal with his first disciples...

the words also apply to all believes.

That's what verse 20 means, when Jesus says, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for all those who will believe in me through their message."

So although the heading in your translation above verse 20 may say "Jesus prays for all believers", actually he has already been praying for all believers from verse 6... it's just that now he explicitly says so.

Verses 1-5 Glory.

As you listen to the prayer you get the distinct impression that Jesus has a very close and intimate relationship with the Father.

Notice Jesus starts his prayer with the word "Father".

It's easy to miss the crucial significance of that first word.
Each of the 21 prayers of Jesus recorded in the Gospels he uses the word 'Father'.
In the Aramaic it is the word 'Abba'...

This intimate contact was really different from the way the rest of the world thought about God.

To the Romans and Greeks, God was either a remote and philosophical concept,
Or else a stack of gods who weren't particularly interested in people.

Even the Jews of Jesus day did not address God so intimately...

This was part of their anger with Jesus.

And when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray...

He gave them, and us, that beautiful opening of 'Our Father'.
Being united with Christ, we have that same access to God as he did.

We also see Jesus has been faithful in obedience to his mission.

As I was preparing my message I couldn't help but notice all the unfinished business on my desk, along with my "to do" list.

I suspect you probably have a similar situation.

Someone said, "God has given me a specific number of things to accomplish on this earth; at the rate I'm going, I'll live forever!"

For those of us whose work seems never done, we can take comfort in the work of Christ...He set out to accomplish our salvation, and He finished the job!

If we lived in 1st Century Israel, and if allowed to enter the Holy Place of the Temple, we would see a table, basin, lampstand, two altars, **but no chair.**

The priests never sat down; their work was never done.

But after Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin, He "sat down";

His work was complete...He fully satisfied the justice of God.

And the benefits of His death will last forever.
It's important to start right, but it's imperative to finish well.
Jesus could truthfully cry from the cross, "It is finished."

And here in verse 4 Jesus sees his work as completed...
The completing of that work brought glory to the Father.

God gets the glory...because Jesus has completed his work.
The work Jesus refers to is of course his death.

It is what he came for.
It is the climax of his mission.
Calvary was no tragedy, no accident.
It was the central, intentional act in God's plan of redemption.
Jesus came to bring glory to God by seeking and saving those who are lost.
God was glorified in the last place we would expect it...
On top of the hill where the cross stood.
This was Jesus mission to glorify the Father.

"Glorify," is a very rich theological word.
Glory means much more than just brightness or splendor, or honour or magnificence.
It is all those things together, plus holiness, goodness, in short, God-ness.

Now although God's Glory brings up images of his unapproachable light and power,
an important aspect of what it means to glorify God is the idea of making God known

And making him known in truth and love.
Jesus glorifies the Father by making him known in the world.

Jesus brought the Father glory.

Here is a true test of whether we are living in the fullness of the Holy Spirit:
Do our lives bring glory to God?
How do our plans and activities, our behavior on the job, at home, and with our
friends glorify God?
Paul writes, "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of
God" (I Cor 10:31).

Verse 6-10 Kept (1-Glory)

Jesus knows He'll be leaving them soon.
Until now, He's been physically present, like a big brother taking care of a kid sister
in the playground.

Soon that will change. He will go back to heaven. The disciples will be on their own.
And then what?

What would become of them?

What would happen to *Simon Peter*?

passionate, full of good ideas, but mouth often in gear before the brain is engaged?

And what about *James & John*?

They always managed to shoulder their way to the front of the line...
what when it was a line of suffering?

And *Matthew*?

He'd left behind a high power job with the tax department.

Could He continue in his passion and service...

or would a job offer from the Jerusalem office of H & R Block be too much to resist.

And what about all the ones that would join these 12 disciples and share their passion and belief in Jesus as God's Son, their Saviour..... what would happen to them?

And so Jesus prays for his followers.

He wants them to hear the prayer...

A prayer for protection.

Protection from sin, protected from Satan.

Jesus is like the parent who prays for their children as they leave home...

Father protect them, give them Christ's inner strength, build up their immune system.

Now God does not protect us from the world by taking us out of the world.

We are to be in the world but not of the world.

In the year 1403, one of the wealthiest men in Paris died, leaving his entire estate to his teenage daughter Agnes. She was a beautiful and virtuous young woman, and many men wanted to marry her. But Agnes decided to give up her fortune and become a recluse. To isolate herself from society, she asked to be sealed into a cell within the wall of a church. The entrance was plastered shut except for one small hole through which food could be passed. She was confined in that small area at 18 years of age and remained there until she died at age 98. [Source unknown]

What a tragedy. What a mistaken idea of being able to protect yourself from the world by withdrawing from the world.

Jesus prayed for us in verse 15, "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one."

Remember the story of the boy in the bubble...

The boy who did not have the ability to fight off germs.

Any infection he got would kill him.

So he was kept in a room-sized plastic bubble...

Fully shielded from the world's contamination.
Research goes on to find the missing ingredient that will build up his immune system.

We can relate this picture to the Christian life.

We can't isolate ourselves from the sin germ in the world.

In fact Jesus says we shouldn't be kept in a bubble.

What we need is the 'antidote' that will build up our immune system.

Sin is all around us, among us, in us.

What we need is inner resistance against it.

We have that antidote, that thing that builds up our immune system in Jesus Christ.

When we accept Jesus as our Saviour and love him as Lord...

Sins sick hold is broken.

We are no longer in danger of being killed off by it.

It no longer has dominion, control, in our hearts and lives.

Jesus, in this prayer, asks that God would not keep us from the world, but make us strong in it.

Strong in the fight against sin in all its display.

Sin that eats away at our lives and causes misery in it.

Sin that eats away at our world and causes poverty, abandonment, sickness.

Sin that destroys our environment.

We need that antidote in Jesus...because we need to keep at life in this world.

We are on a mission in this world.

There is nothing antiseptic about that mission.

We are sent into a broken world, where sin has created havoc.

As Jesus Christ touched lepers...so we reach out to the helpless and hopeless.

We share their plight, we seek to relieve their need, and to share with them the healing power of Jesus Christ.

That is what makes Enoch and Grace get involved in the lives of the children in India.

That is why we are involved in the lives of those in Shawlands Caravan Park.

That is why we go to Tidal River, Warburton, Mozambique and to our very neighbours.

It is a difficult mission...

Easy to write about it...harder to live it.

It seems so much more sensible to hide away in our bubble with the purified air.

But Jesus keeps an eye on us.

He prays for us as we go.

"Holy Father," prays Jesus (v.11), *"protect them by the power of your name..."*

There is no way that a person can hang in there as a follower of Jesus,

that a person can enjoy the glory that comes through Him,

the life that comes through His death on the cross –
NO ONE can hang in there except that there be heavenly power backing them up,
protecting them, moving them along.

The power of the name.....

the name standing for God's reputation: all His heavenly resources and abilities;

Think about this:

the power and ability that created the world in the first place,
that parted the Red Sea and brought Israel safely through,
that could stop the sun in its tracks for 24 hours,
that brought and then pulled back a huge flood,
that healed sick people, raised the dead,
sent an army of 100,000 seasoned warriors running in terror,
and provided food and drink to people who had none.

As Jesus goes to the cross he asks for that mighty hand of God to be wrapped around
his disciples...

To be wrapped around us.

Can we have any better security?

Verses 20-26 Unity (Glory; kept)

Jesus doesn't pray that they would stand firm and strong as rugged individuals.

No John ? from the Die Hard movies taking on everyone on his own.

In Australia we are know to stick up for our mates.

That's what Jesus prays his church will be like.

That they will be one.

Protect them..... that they may be one.

United we stand.

How do you think Satan prefers to tackle the job of disturbing and destroying the
faith of believers in Jesus?

It was when he was alone that Peter denied Jesus.

It was when he was alone that Mark wiggled out of his robe and ran off,
naked and terrified.

It was alone that Judas was convinced by the Priests to deny Jesus.

Alone he tried to give the blood money back to them.

Alone, he hung himself.

The disciples needed each other. Satan tried to pull them apart.

We need each other. Satan tries his sinister best to pull us apart.

He works especially hard when things are going reasonably well in our lives.

When there is unity, the power and life of Jesus flows.

When we separate ourselves out – power stops flowing.

Decay sets in.

Satan cheers.

Jesus prayed, and continues to pray from heaven, that we hang together.
That protecting, life-giving heavenly power would flow in and through us...
....together.

Someone said that if everyone in the church was praying for everyone else...

Guess what...there would be unity.

How can you hold something against someone, if you are praying for them?
How can you be only self focused, if you are praying for everyone else?

I thought that a good way to make this happen is to pray your way through the church phone directory.

Just one person a day.

And if you don't know someone...find out about them.
Pray for each other and unity follows.

Jesus prayed that we would be one.

We should continue that pray for oneness today.

Conclusion

This prayer of Jesus took place on the night before he died.

He probably prayed it in the upper room after the Last Supper, or somewhere between the Upper Room and the Garden of Gethsemane.

The words of this prayer are his conclusion to the teaching of chapters 14 to 16, where he has told them about his going away and the coming of the Holy Spirit as another Comforter and Guide.

He prayed out loud, in the presence of his disciples, because he wanted to encourage them.

And these words are written down by John so that we may know Jesus and have eternal life and also be encouraged, to persevere in Him.

This passage teaches the wonderful truth that we don't have to rely on our own strength or goodness for our salvation.

And God promises to protect our weak and faltering faith in this hostile world.

Yet He continues to work through us.

God may want to love someone, to speak to someone through us today.

We glorify God when we tell people what God has done for us;

how He has made a difference in our lives.

Jesus gave glory to God...

We can continue that glory giving work.