

Lessons from Last Year

- John 17:1-26
- I started to name this sermon “Lessons for Me in ’23.” And that would lead of course to, “Expecting More in ’24.” But I spared you that title. Or did I?
- For those new to Antioch, I like to take the last Sunday of the year, or sometimes the first in the new year, to look back at some things God spoke to me about and I recorded in my journal. That’s what I hope to share with you this morning. The next two Sundays, the elders will preach through a Mission Statement for Antioch that we have been working on for the past several months. Just by way of reminder of who we are at Antioch and where we are headed. Then on the third Sunday in January, Lord willing, we will begin our journey through the book of 2 Peter. There are still some Scripture journals on the credenza if you want one. They provide the text of the letter on one page and a place for notes on the other. Many of you used those for 1 Peter, and 2 Peter and Jude are in the same journal. Help yourself, any of you who want to take notes and then have the journal to refer back to in times to come. I will order more if we run out.
- I will start my three points from my journal today with the most recent entry, from this week.
- **Jesus loves his sheep**
- This past week I was reading in John 17 and felt like the Lord was highlighting this prayer of Jesus, one that I had read many times before. Then Cindy and I read the last entry in RC Sproul’s book, *The Advent of Glory*, and it was on John 17 as well. Hmmm. I wanted Janet to read the whole chapter today because the prayer is powerful and rich and we could spend weeks looking at it phrase by phrase. But let me point out a few things that leapt off the page to me.
- First, *We were given to the Son that he might give us eternal life!* Verses 1-2: “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.” RC Sproul wrote, “Why did Jesus come? Because of his great, arresting, gripping, abiding love for his sheep, for all those whom the Father had given him.” We know the true gift of Christmas to those who believe is the birth of the Savior in Bethlehem. At the same time, the gift to Jesus from the Father is the church, the sheep who are called by his name! He loves us and he is praying for us. Look at verse 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.”
- Second, *Eternal life is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ, his eternally sent Son.* You cannot know one without the other. And there is no other but the one true God.
- Third, *We grow up and grow into his likeness by the Word, because it is truth.* Verse 17: Jesus asks God to “Sanctify them in the truth: your word is truth.”
- Fourth, *We are sent into the world as Jesus was sent.* Verse 18: “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” Why? *Because Jesus has other sheep that have not come into the fold yet, and he is asking the Father for them!* Verse 20: “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me *through their word...*” He said the same in John 10.
- Fifth, *Jesus longs for us to be with him!* Verse 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.” Jesus loves his sheep. Next, much earlier this year, I wrote about...
- **Three Prayer Requests**
- On January 5, I wrote some thoughts about the elders’ prayer service we had the night before. This is where the elders pray over families or singles as we enter the new year, and we will do the same this Wednesday, from 6:30-8:30. I was struck last year by three recurring prayer requests from the 30 or so households we prayed for that evening and on subsequent Sundays.
- One was, “I want to be able to really read the Bible and not just check the box. I want to better understand what I am reading and grow in my knowledge of God and his word.” I love the heart

behind that prayer request and agree with it myself. I don't want to just read the Bible in the morning because that is part of my routine. I want to be changed by it. But there is good news on this. God said the fact that his word will change us is as reliable as the fact that rain and snow from heaven water the earth and bring forth fruit. He says in the same way, "...so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:10-11). Reading the Bible feeds the soul as water from heaven nourishes the earth. Paul said all Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for 4 things: for teaching (we learn truth from it); for reproof (we are told what is *not* true that we have believed to be true); for correction (we are told what behaviors are not good); and for training in righteousness (we are told how to live in a way that pleases God). -2 Timothy 3:16. I know the heart of that request last January was to learn better how to study the Bible, and that is an area we are addressing in many ways in the life of the church. But know this: God is at work as you read the Word, as you share it with your family, as you sit under it here on Sundays or at the women's Bible Study or at home group. And remember, he delights in giving us what we ask for when what we ask for is his will. His will *is* for us to know him and follow him by living in and walking out his word!

- A second recurring prayer request was for sons and daughters who once professed faith but are no longer walking with the Lord. I have never lost a child and cannot imagine the pain and grief that some of you have suffered. But there are many in this congregation and in churches everywhere who have living sons and daughters who are in the far country. Jesus knew about that, didn't he? He told a story about it. I think our best hope for our sons and daughters who are estranged from the faith is to do what the father did in Luke 15. Though it is not stated, we must believe that he prayed for his son, and that he would return. And I believe he prayed with hope, with expectation, because when his son did come back, remember this? "While he was still a long way off, his father saw him." You know the rest of the story. The father ran to his son to welcome him home. He embraced him and kissed him because his son had been dead but was now alive. He was lost but now was found. Saints, one of the encouragements for me is the knowledge that God holds the heart of kings in his hand, and "he turns it wherever he will." It is a reminder that there is no way I can force one of my children to follow the Lord. But the Lord holds that child's heart in his hand, whether young or old, and he turns it wherever he will. Our job is to pray and to love and to keep looking down that road for them to return.
- A third recurring prayer was for boldness in witness. I wrote in my notes about one young man, in his teens, who asked for this. That thrilled my soul. It reminded me of Acts 4 when Peter and John had been arrested and spent a night in prison because they had been preaching about Jesus after healing the lame beggar in Jesus' name. They were brought before the high priest and the rulers and elders and scribes the next morning to give an account of the healing. They looked at Peter and John and said, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" And Peter said in effect, *It's Jesus! He is our authority.* Isn't that true for you and me as well? It is! Why is that enough, that we know Jesus and he is the Lord? Why is that the reason to be bold? Because of what Peter said next: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." But you say, *yeah, but this was Peter and John. They were apostles!* Listen to what Luke wrote next in Acts 4: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13) That's the source of our boldness as well. We know Jesus. We spend time with Jesus. We know he changes people's lives because he has changed ours. We know he is the only one who *can* change a life. And we know people who are lost. Dead in their sins. And we know Jesus. That gives us boldness. He gives us boldness. And remember what Paul wrote to Timothy when encouraging this young man to be bold: "for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." (2 Tim. 1:7)
- **It's a wonderful life**
- For any of you who have seen the Christmas classic, you remember George Bailey is given, as the angel Clarence says, "a rare gift." He got to see what life would have been like if he had never been born. And

he learned that his life mattered more than he ever imagined. On May 22 this year we gathered, and the church was full, to give thanks that Ray Davis had been with us and touched our lives in so many ways. Ways that Ray had probably never imagined. His life mattered more than any single one of us could ever know, until we heard the stories. It was a wonderful service of celebration of a life well lived. The testimonies by family and friends were powerful and touching and funny as one after another people spoke about how their lives were better because of Ray. I was reminded of a time when I took my family years ago to visit the Billy Graham Library. We did the tour and were introduced to many of the people who were touched by the life of Billy Graham. I was thinking about that after Ray died, and I thought, if there was a Ray Davis Library, many of us would be in it. Our stories would be told as they intersected with Ray's story. But the library certainly wouldn't be about any of us. It wouldn't even be about Ray. Like the Billy Graham Library, the Ray Davis Library would be about the Lord Jesus Christ and his glorious Gospel. It is the same for you and me and each one who knows the Lord.

- I got to hear Ray Ortlund preach this year when Cindy and I visited Susanna and Luke in Nashville. His text was Philippians 1:6, "And 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." And I loved one of the things Ray Ortlund said about the day of Jesus Christ, the final day, the day we are all looking forward to. He said he imagines it being like a movie and "The End" will appear on the cosmic screen and the credits will begin to roll. Faith: Jesus Christ. Hope: Jesus Christ. Love: Jesus Christ. Astoundingly successful conclusion: Jesus Christ. Then Ray Ortlund said, "Who God is, is more important to who I am than who I am." I think Ray Davis' memorial service reminded us of that truth. Truth that we don't realize sometimes until one we loved leaves us. That's why the Bible says, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." (Psalm 116:15)
- Prayer
- Greet One Another