

The High Priestly Prayer

Part 4
John 17:9-19

With Study Questions

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I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. ¹⁰ And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹ Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. ¹² While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³ But now I come 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 pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. ¹⁸ As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth (John 17:9-19).

Introduction

We often pray for things that do not come to pass. The long and short of this problem has nothing to do with God's abilities or goodness and everything to do with our own limitations as those offering prayers, "For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought" (Roman 8:26), or as James writes, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss" (James 4:3).

Not getting what we want in prayer might remove the fuel of energy in our prayers, bringing about cynicism in our already sinful hearts. Critics will utilize the apparent lack of answered prayer as an attack on the legitimacy of the Christian faith and existence of God. It escapes our attention that God utilizes the prayers of men for the express purpose of bringing glory to His own name in His plan of redemption. How the saints

in heaven must marvel at the overwhelming results of their prayers for the advancement of Christ's kingdom – regardless of how disappointed they might have been while in this world.

But Jesus is not indifferent to our discouragement. In this High Priestly Prayer He speaks these prayerful words **“in the world”** that those who trust in Him would have his **“joy fulfilled”** in them. Christians must be careful not to measure God's success founded upon the way they desire He respond to them, but in the sure confidence of knowing how the Father will respond to the Son.

Jesus prays this prayer with the expressed purpose of our hearing it. So we listen in with great encouragement – that our hearts might be at peace, knowing our salvation is never in danger because it has been entrusted to our faithful Savior.

Review

The first five verses of this prayer find Jesus praying for Himself – that He might be glorified. But the glory which Jesus prays for Himself has two ends – that He might glorify His Father and that He should give eternal life to those whom the Father had given Him.

In verse six through eight we learn of how Jesus had manifested the Father's name to His followers which was evidenced by their keeping of the word. We continue.

I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours (John 17:9).

Not for the World

Why would this be included in this prayer? Why would Jesus indicate those for whom He doesn't pray? In our interactions we may offer a similar idea in an effort to convey the special affections or trust we might have for someone. “I don't let just anyone babysit my kids” or a young man or woman might say, “I don't let just anyone hold my hand” in an effort to reveal the special place the person has.

The followers of Jesus, especially in this historical context, were surrounded by hypocrisy, savagery and rebellion. When Jesus indicates

that He does not pray for the world but for His own it would reveal, among other things, just why it was His followers were not engaging in that profligate lifestyle and spiritual rebellion. Furthermore it would serve to encourage them to realize that their ultimate victory was sure, in the face of their own temporal failures and weakness. How comforting this must have been for Peter in the midst of his denials, to know Jesus had prayed for him, that his **“faith should not fail” (Luke 22:32).**

A prayer like this reveals the non random plan of God. There are an elect people, known but to God that are the special objects of His redemption. A prayer like this is one that we, not knowing the hidden decrees of God, cannot imitate. We are called to pray for **“all men” (1 Timothy 2:1).**

But Christians, as people who by the grace of God, trust in Christ, can know that this prayer is for them. He will then state the great unity and intimacy of possession.

And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them (John 17:10).

The Possessive God

“He/she is so possessive” is generally considered to be an indictment against a person; and there may certainly be a negative side to it. As for me, when my wife tells me I belong to her or my children see me and say “that’s my dad” I enjoy the intimacy of those statements.

When that intimacy and possessiveness is applied to the Father and the Son the aim of such a prayer is the great assurance that we belong to God as children whom He loves. To be possessed by Christ is to be possessed by the Father.

And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and My Father are one (John 10:28-30).

When Jesus indicates that He is glorified in those whom He saves, He conveys that chief end and man, to glorify God. An important distinction here to make is not so much that Christians glorify God (as if we have what it takes by our natures to somehow elevate the name of God) but that God glorifies Himself through Christians – the way an architect might be glorified by reconstructing a home destroyed by a flood.

Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We *are* (John 17:11).

Being “Kept” in Christ’s Bodily Absence

Jesus prays here in anticipation of His finished work (cf. 17:4). His bodily presence would soon be absent and He prays for those who remain. It may not have been as readily apparent to the followers of Jesus how it was better for Him to go (John 16:7). No doubt there was something comforting about the physical presence of Jesus. But there is a possibility that the physical presence of Jesus (which certainly was restricted in time and space – to a few people over a very few years) could have distracted from God’s purpose in His plan.

It was Paul’s explanation of Christian’s being “**a new creation**” that he emphasized that “**Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer**” (2 Corinthians 5:16). It is the prayer of Jesus that the Father “**keep**” His children safe in His bodily absence. This would be accomplished by the “**Spirit of Christ**” (Romans 8:9; 1 Peter 1:11).

It would be through the Spirit, guiding believers to the truth of His word, that the oneness will and purpose would be accomplished.

While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled (John 17:12).

Kept By Faith

Jesus has prayed that the Father would “**keep**” His children in the faith—in His name, indicating here that while in the world He accomplished this. One thing we must realize is that if we have faith (no matter how weak or small) it is evidence of God’s answer to this prayer. If God were to let us go, if He failed to keep us, our faith would vanish.

It is to the glory of God and the peace of our hearts that we know that “**kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:5)**”. We are kept by the power of God. The instrument by which God keeps us is faith, which is itself a gift from God.

What About Judas?

A natural question the apostles might have at this juncture might be “what about Judas?” From outward observation he was just like the rest of the apostles—yet he was a betrayer (John 18:4). Although we might not see such a drastic turn of events in the lives of those who at one time profess Christ then later deny that profession (although I’ve seen some pretty drastic apostasies), it is important for us to realize that Judas didn’t, as it were, slip through the fingers of Jesus.

Perdition means destruction, ruin or the needless squandering of a resource. When Jesus says that Judas “is lost” it is in the middle voice indicating that he destroyed himself. The willful rebellion of Judas and those like him is not a testimony against Christ’s ability to keep or God’s ability to keep His own by the instrument of faith as it is a testimony to the counterfeit nature of their profession in the first place. John is no stranger to the false professions and gives explanation of them later.

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us (1 John 2:19).

That “**the Scripture might be fulfilled**” is to say that the decree of God might be fulfilled. The plan of redemption is no random plan. God’s decrees and providential working out of those decrees extend to the

minutia. The Christian is to be assured that his days are “**fashioned**” for him “**when as yet there were none of them**” (Psalm 139:16).

For I *am* God, and *there is* no other; I *am* God, and *there is* none like Me,¹⁰ Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times *things* that are not *yet* done, Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,’¹¹ Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken *it*; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed *it*; I will also do it (Isaiah 46:9-11).

But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves (John 17:13).

Joy Fulfilled

What Jesus would pray in the true Holy of Holies before the presence of His Father, He prays here for the benefit of those who put their trust in Him – that our hearts may have the peace of knowing the power of His blood and the certainty of His advocacy. For those who place a priority on having peace with God, this is the source of greatest joy.

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 pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one (John 17:14, 15).

Hated by the World

Here Jesus acknowledges the natural enmity between those who keep His word and the surrounding world which hates them and the word they keep. This is not to say that Christians should be sporting for unnecessary conflict or feeling justified that their disgruntled disposition is not received well by their unbelieving acquaintances. Paul teaches quite the opposite.

If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men (Romans 12:18).

But the “**as much as depends on you**” is a pretty large qualifier. Christians are not given the option by God to alter His word or compromise His message. God’s plan of redemption is not a plan which adopts the ways of the world but transforms the ways of the world. To the extent that this transformation takes place we will live in relative harmony. We happen to live in a nation with evangelized underpinnings. Consequently, Christians have lived in peace. But that peace had explosive beginnings.

When we see seminaries, like Claremont (which had Methodist beginnings) diversify themselves as an ecumenical institution for Judaism and Islam, one wonders if the professing Christians spearheading this effort have ever read these words.

Insulated or Isolated?

Christians are to view themselves as engaged in a fight. And Jesus is not offering us retreat. He does not pray that God “**should take them (us) out of the world.**” We are to be insulated not isolated. The prayer is for protection from evil. How encouraging to know this is a prayer which will be answered by the Father in a manner consistent with the prayer itself. As Calvin teaches:

In short, God does not *take his people out of the world*, because he does not wish them to be effeminate and slothful; but he *delivers them from evil*, that they may not be overwhelmed; for he wishes them to fight, but does not suffer them to be mortally wounded.¹

Jesus then gives the prescription by which the sanctification (spiritual maturing) of the Christians takes place.

¹Calvin, J. (1998). *Calvin's Commentaries: John* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; Calvin's Commentaries (Jn 17:15). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth (John 17:16, 17).

Sanctified by Truth

The true Christian will always recognize the alien and foreign nature of their existence this side of glory. There is a continual transformation for which Jesus prays. The tool by which the sanctification takes place is truth and the source of that truth is God's word.

I think it is a healthy pursuit to continually be astonished about how wrong we are in the exposing light of God's word. In response to the sword of God's refining word, we are to live in a perpetual disposition of repentance where our minds are changed – transformed as Paul writes (Romans 12:2).

And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth (John 17:19).

A Sanctified Savior

Jesus sanctified Himself (He set Himself apart) for the redeeming work of the elect – that they may be sanctified by the truth. In the Lord's Supper we pray God would consecrate (or sanctify) the elements from a common to a sacred use. We recognize the elements are outwards signs and seals – demonstrating how He sanctifies the **“people with His own blood” (Hebrews 13:12).**

It is the sanctification of Christ and His sanctifying blood that provides for the totality of our salvation from election to glory. The prayer that Jesus prays for you as a Christian is a prayer for victory over all enemies – including death itself. In the midst of our trials and difficulties we pause and examine this wonderful prayer that the joy of Christ might be fulfilled in us.

Questions for Study

1. Why do many prayers appear to go unanswered? What is the danger here (pages 2, 3)?
2. What is the ultimate purpose of prayer (page 3)?
3. What was one major reason why Jesus prayed the High Priestly Prayer “in the world” (page 3)?
4. Why would Jesus mention people He doesn’t include in His prayer (pages 3, 4)?
5. When it is good or not good to be possessive? Is it good for God to be possessive (page 4)?
6. Can you think of some reasons why it was better for Jesus to be absent in terms of His physical body (page 5)?
7. How does God “keep” us (pages 5, 6)?
8. What is “perdition?” Why do you think Jesus mentions Judas in this prayer (page 6)?
9. Should Christians seek to be hated by the world? Why are they (page 7, 8)?
10. Discuss the difference between being insulated from the world and isolated from the world (page 8).
11. What is sanctification and how does it take place according to Jesus’ prayer (page 8)?
12. How does the sanctification of Jesus contribute to our sanctification (pages 8, 9)?