

Jesus' Abiding Prayer for His Disciples

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John 17:6-11a

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When American actress Joan Crawford lay dying in her bed in 1977, her housemaid came to assist her. The house had been put back together in perfect order. Everything was perfectly clean. Everything, that is, except for Joan's soul. Having suffered greatly in her life, her soul was in great anxt in these final moments of her life. Her housemaid came to her and asked her if she could pray for her, to which Crawford responded by swearing and saying "Don't pray for me!" And then she breathed her last.

Have you ever thought about what your final hours of your life might be like? Have you ever thought what you might say or pray? For many people in their final hours of life, they merely revert to doing what is most important to them. In Jesus' final hours, everything he does is intentional. He spends these dark hours with his closest disciples, eating with them in a way that teaches them about his death and preparing them for the resurrection. He takes them to the Garden where he had often gone to pray. And there, he does what he has done many times before. He prays. But this prayer is a model prayer, a prayer that is intended to be heard and followed. It is an intentional prayer.

Jesus' prayer has been divided into three parts. Last week we heard Jesus pray for himself and for his glorification in vv. 1-5. This week we hear the first part of Jesus' prayer for his disciples in vv. 6-19, and in a few weeks we will come to Jesus' prayer for his Church in vv. 20-26. While we focus on Jesus' prayer for his 11 disciples in these verses, I think it is right to apply all of these verses to us as well for this simple reason: The requests Jesus has for his 11 disciples are the same requests that he has prayed elsewhere for you and me. So as we look at these verses, what we discover is a model of prayer that we ought to pray for all disciples everywhere. What does Jesus pray in this dark hour? And can we follow his model prayer for ourselves?

1. Pray for those given to Christ (v. 6).

As Jesus now prays for his disciples, he begins with a focus on those that the Father has given to him. We have already heard Jesus refer to his disciples as those given to him by the Father in v. 2 and now again we hear it in these verses. The fact that Jesus has been given a particular people for whom he will die should not surprise us. The fact that the Father has some unconditionally chosen and the Son has a particular people to die for are two very precious teachings that should bring comfort to our souls. Unconditional election and particular atonement are not teachings that should cause endless speculation. Nowhere does the Bible commend to us the practice of figuring out who is elect. Rather, the Bible teaches us to respond to Christ with trust and make this calling and election sure by working out our faith (as 2 Pe. 1:2 says).

The way that Jesus prays for those who have been chosen by the Father is very instructive. First, he prays for those to whom he has manifested the Father's name. What does it mean to 'manifest' a name to someone? We can be helped by hearing an echo of Psalm 22:22: "I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you." And when we think about someone's name being revealed or manifested to us, we should not reduce this idea to just the disclosure of a name. If I say to you, "I've showed you my name," it doesn't mean that I've been hiding some secret name that I have from you. Rather, it means that I have disclosed who I am and my character to you. For Jesus to have revealed the Father's name to his disciples is to reveal not only God's names – Yahweh Yireh, Yahweh Sabaoth, Elohim, etc...) but also his character

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and nature. Jesus has spent time with his disciples to show them what the Father is like inside and out.

By revealing to them what his Father is like, Jesus has called his disciples 'out of the world.' When John refers to 'the world,' he has in his mind the system that is corrupt and opposed to the ways of God. There is no longer a devotion to the old system. There is no longer a love of this system. Rather, there is a new devotion, and Jesus prays that their devotion remain strong – that they have been called out of their devotion to the world and its system and into a new devotion – 'they have kept your word.'

Jesus has referred to those who do and do not keep his word many times already. In John 14:15 and 24, it is clear that those who keep his Word are those who obey his Word. By not following a devotion to the system of this world, it has been replaced with a devotion to follow and obey the Word of Christ. The old has been expelled with the new.

As I read these verses, I couldn't help but think of my friend Jason. Twenty years ago, Jason was a stranger to me. I knew his in-laws, but Jason had reached rock bottom. From a phone booth outside his apartment in Winnipeg, he called me. We didn't know each other at all, but his father-in-law gave him my number. We talked for over an hour, and Jason told me how he was so fed up with his life. He was out at the phone booth calling me because he didn't want his wife to know he was calling a pastor. The partying wasn't fun anymore. The connection in his new marriage had faded fast. He hated his job. We prayed. And we hung up.

A few months later, Jason and his wife moved to the same town where we were living. We met. He had given his life to Christ. And he wanted to change.

Jason and I don't talk as frequently any more, but we still talk. And when I hear these words of Jesus, I can't help but think of Jason. In a semi truck rolling down the road with a big load of timber, Jason gave his life to Christ. The old way of life went and he and his wife devoted their lives to Christ. Today Jason leads a men's Bible study at his church and is a regular attendee of a group of men who are devoted to the Word. You might say, "But this sounds like Jason chose God." And he did. But the only way he chose to follow Christ was because Christ revealed the Father to him and died for him. We might ask a one-year-old from nursery, "Did you get washed this morning?" And they might nod affirmingly. Yet we know that it was their parent who ran the water, who got them in the tub, who washed them up, and who dried them off. In the same way, when we come to Christ it feels like we have done something because much has been done for us. For this reason, Christ prays for those who have been given to him so that they might reflect the change that the Word of Christ brings.

2. Pray to receive and believe the Word of Christ (vv. 7-8)

As Jesus continues to pray, he focuses on their reception and belief in what he has said (READ vv. 7-8). Over the course of his earthly ministry, Jesus had given his disciples instructions on all sorts of things. But the ultimate aim was to teach his disciples who he was and where he had come from. And everything he was teaching his disciples did not come as some unique teaching but came from his Father in heaven.

Sometimes people come to the Bible and they open it up and hear good morals for living. They see the benefits that come from being loving, sacrificial, kind, and good. But Jesus did not come to make bad people good. He came to make dead people alive. And the way that he makes dead people alive is by giving them His Word that has come from God.

A few weeks before I began pastoral ministry, I was invited to hear Leroy Eims speak. At the time, Leroy was in his mid 80s. Leroy Eims has helped many people to disciple and train other people through his book *The Lost Art of Disciplemaking*. On that April day in 1999, Melanie and I were sitting on the floor in this home in Kenora listening to Leroy share how he had come to faith. He told the story how he decided that he would read the Bible cover-to-cover. He wanted to know more about the Christian faith. As he read through the OT, he saw the sacrificial system, the ways that God required people to repent and believe, and he was struck by this holy and awesome God. But then, when he got to the NT, he discovered something glorious: all of the requirements and demands of God had been met in Jesus Christ! As he finished reading Revelation and closed the Bible, he had come to believe that Jesus was not some mere man, but he was from God who had come to rescue sinners from their sin.

This is Jesus' prayer – that the Words that he has given are received and believed! The words of Christ have been destination-altering words for people for over two millennia. And we ought to pray that these words continue to have their effect. Before we open our Bibles, we should be praying, “Lord, help me to receive these words that come from your mouth. Help me see Jesus on every page. And help me believe!”

But it is not enough to merely give mental assent to the words of Christ. We have to rely upon them and expect that these Words are living and active words that give us daily life and joy and help and strength. That is why we ought to...

3. Pray to glorify Christ

As we saw last week, Christ's prayer is a prayer full of glory. In v. 10, he returns to this theme again, stating to the Father that we will glorify Christ. This raises two questions: what does it mean to glorify Christ, and second, how do we glorify Christ?

Sometimes it's easier to think about these things through an analogy. In the children's book *Fool Moon Rising*, the moon comes out and boasts about how beautiful and great it is. All of its light, splendor, and majesty are on display. But then the moon learns that the reason any of it can be seen is because of the light of the sun that reflects off of it.

In the same way, the way we glorify God is by acknowledging that any good that is in us is because of the light of the glory of God that reflects in our lives. If we belong to God and Christ, then his goodness is working in us so that we might display back to the world around us his glory. So the way we glorify God is by giving credit to God for how great he is. And this is Jesus' prayer – that we reflect that we belong to him by giving credit for any goodness in us coming from him. We can do this in simple ways: when someone praises us, we can say, “Thank you, praise God!” We can acknowledge how the Lord has helped us, given us gifts, and made us

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so that we might reflect his beauty. And in doing these things, we give credit to where credit is due.

Pray to remain on mission for Christ (v. 11a)

As Jesus prays, he acknowledges that he is no longer staying in this world in his physical body but is going to die and be glorified to heaven to be with his Father. But we will remain. And we remain because Christ's mission to save sinners has yet to be fully realized. There are people who do not know Christ. There are people God has chosen to reveal himself to, and you are here because God has chosen you to be his ambassador to tell a world lost in darkness and confusion that Jesus Christ has come to rescue them from sin, from death, from the punishment of sin, from life without God and from hopelessness.

But, you might say, I don't feel very adequate to share this good news. I'm like Moses – I stammer and am not eloquent in speech. I don't know all the answers. If only I had help. Robert Murray M'Cheyne, a young Scottish preacher, once said, "If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million of enemies. Yet the distance makes no difference; He is praying for me."

Friends, Christ has prayed and is praying for you! He is interceding for you at the Father's right side. He is praying for your effective ministry. He is praying that you would be kept by God to the very end. He is praying that you will receive and believe the word and walk in obedience. Christ is praying!

The very final acts of Christ on earth are the very things that he continues to do in heaven – he prays! And he prays for you and for me! He is pleading with his Father. So it is not your prayer that is most powerful and effective, but his! And let the prayers of Christ strengthen you this very day. When you open the Bible, Christ is praying for you to receive and believe these words. He is praying that you will obey these words. When you face trials and temptations of many kinds, he is praying to his Father that you will be kept from sin and walk in obedience. And when you go to share your faith, Christ is praying for you to be bold, to declare Christ, and not shrink back!

In the end, the ultimate prayer is not what you would say or pray in your final hours. It is what has been prayed for you. Do you believe it? Do you rely upon it? Joan Crawford might not have wanted her housemaid to pray for her, but those who trust the Lord Jesus Christ should hear these words: Christ is praying for you. He is the King of kings. He is the Lord of lords. He is the pray-er of pray-ers. Don't let your heart be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in Christ – the one so radically for you that he won't ever stop being your most ardent prayer warrior!