

John 17:11b-19 - What Should We Pray For?

Seventh Sunday of Easter - 16 May 2021

TEXT

¹¹...I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

¹³ "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy

within them. ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

INTRODUCTION

We are in a transition period in the Church Year. We have been celebrating Jesus' resurrection, the cornerstone of our faith, first looking at his resurrection appearances and the effects of his resurrection. Now we look at how Jesus prepares his disciples for what they are to do next, go out into the world with the message of that resurrection. The next part of the church year focusses on what Jesus' disciples do in this world in the knowledge of their Savior's resurrection. At this point Jesus has ascended into heaven, which really means he disappeared from sight while continuing to be with them everywhere. They were soon to disperse into twelve different directions, and he would be with all of them everywhere, even as he is present with all of us everywhere.

Here Jesus offers a prayer to his heavenly Father on behalf of these disciples to prepare them for their work. These words were spoken just hours before he would be arrested and crucified, and he knew it. It seems he spoke this in the disciples' presence for their benefit. Of course we are Jesus' modern-day disciples. We can look at these words to see what Jesus even now is praying for us. We can also look at this prayer to see what are some important things we will want to pray to our heavenly Father for as we consider serving him in this world.

What Should We Pray For?

I. PRAY FOR ONENESS

In carrying out Jesus' command to go into all the world, to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth, Jesus' disciples would spread out just as he commanded. The Bible doesn't give us much information on this, but secular history, which isn't always accurate but is a guide for us, indicates that they went far (we use the modern-day country names to refer to where they went: John and Philip to Turkey, Peter to Italy, James to Spain, Matthew to Iran, Thomas to India, Andrew to Bulgaria, Thaddeus to Iraq. Most died carrying

out their work and probably never met again. But they were one and Jesus wanted them to remain as one, in their faith and work. (Read v11b.) An example of this oneness in the secular world is the efforts made to keep US embassy personnel “one” in their representation of the United States overseas. Their homes and living styles are made as American as possible, they move every two years or so, so that they remain truly American. Jesus prayed that his disciples remain one in their faith and mission also.

They would have that oneness by being protected by his name. God’s name is not just an arbitrary word used to refer to him, as a modern-day parent might pick out a name for their new-born child. It tells who he is and what he does: Lord, Savior, Comforter, Redeemer, Sanctifier; it refers to what he says about himself in his word. And there lies the key: Listening and learning about what God does for us in his word. The disciples had heard Jesus speaking directly. Perhaps they had written some things down, but they also could sit and meditate on what he said. And so they spread the same message in many parts of the world

It is important for us to be one in his name. Our Lord revealed certain truths through his name that are important to spreading the proper message about him. He doesn’t have double meanings behind his name, only one. Not being one means someone is spreading an improper message about who Jesus is and what he does. To stay one, we study his word to see what he has revealed about himself, and we seek to be one in what we understand. We pray that we stay in this oneness for the sake of his work, oneness in faith and mission, not oneness in politics or attitudes toward masks and vaccines.

II. PRAY FOR JOY

Another thing Jesus wanted for his disciples was to have the joy he had. (Read v13.) He wanted them to have that joy within them. At this time Jesus knew that only hours later he would be arrested, beaten, tried, and crucified; he would be abandoned by his Father on the cross, and he would die. The disciples probably did not see notes of joy in his face, certainly not while he prayed fervently in the garden.

But there was joy within him, inside him. He knew his work would be successful, that many people would be saved for all eternity through what he was doing. That brought him joy, deep inside him. That joy sustained him in his suffering. The writer to the Hebrews puts it this way, *“For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”* (12:2).

Jesus was praying that his disciples have that same joy deep inside them. They too would face suffering, persecution, even death for carrying out their work of proclaiming Jesus to many others. Such joy would sustain them. They would have joy for a somewhat different reason. They were all by nature sinners, destined to an eternity of punishment. Jesus saved them from that, saved them for an eternity of happiness and glory in heaven. Listening to Jesus

words about these things gave them joy which they could hang onto in their darkest hour. Knowing that Jesus not only was waiting for them in heaven but also with them in their darkest hours would give them joy. They would also find joy inside them when the people that spoke to responded with faith and commitment, perhaps even as they were being persecuted.

Perhaps this can be compared to the joy a couple feels when they find out the wife is pregnant. They perhaps choose not to tell other people about their joyful news, even concealing it, but there is joy within them. This joy can overshadow problems in their lives; there may be job loss, family discord, setbacks in life, but the joy of looking forward to a child overshadows them all.

Jesus wants us to have this joy within us also and it is an appropriate thing to pray for. Pray for joy, joy even in your darkest hours, joy knowing God is with you and has an eternal home waiting for you. Hanging on to this joy involves again listening to Jesus' words, words he speaks through his inspired writers for the strengthening of our faith.

III. PRAY FOR PROTECTION

In this prayer Jesus has asked his heavenly Father for protection, as the basis for asking for oneness and joy. At this point in the prayer he pinpoints the need for this protection and from whom this protection is needed: (Read v14-15.) The world hates them. The world is not the sphere we live on; it is people, people in opposition to God and his people. God's people make up only a small minority in this world; the vast majority are opposed to God and his word: this is the world. They are, unwittingly, under the power of the devil, the evil one. These all hate God and his people and his work; they seek to stop it, to overthrow it; they especially seek to stop those who spread his word. Whoever is not for Jesus is against him and against his people.

Therefore, these people present a threat to God's people. God is all-powerful and can do anything he wishes—he could vaporize these people. Jesus does not pray that they be taken out of the world, or that these people be struck down; he just prays they be protected from their attacks. After all these people are also targets of the gospel we proclaim, people whom Jesus wants to call into his family. This can remind us of how God's people prayed after Peter and John were arrested and released: *“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness”* (Acts 4:29). This was the very word which got them arrested in the first place. It was as if they were going into the lions' den and the people prayed that the lion not hurt them. This is what Jesus is praying for.

Eventually many of these disciples would be killed for preaching in the gospel. Does this mean God didn't answer Jesus' prayer? No, God protected them long enough to get the work done he had called them for, and then he called them home, sometimes through the sword or the cross of those persecuting them.

We too pray for protection from the evil one and from his people in this world. This happens not when we hide from the world or avoid speaking about Jesus to other people but precisely when we do just that. Our message is contrary to what the world's message is; it puts us in opposition to the world in so many ways; our message, what we do, what we stand for will arouse hate and persecution when speak it. We pray that God protect us so that we can tell his word to other people, protect us until the day when he considers our work done and calls us home to himself by whatever way he sees best. Pray for that protection so you can be ready for the attacks.

IV. PRAY FOR HOLINESS

Jesus concludes this part of his prayer with a request that his disciples be sanctified, made holy. (Read v16-19.) To be holy, in its most basic sense, is to be set apart. God is holy, set apart, partly because he does not sin. He sets his people apart because they become his people, are viewed as holy in his sight, are destined for heaven. This being set apart shows itself in their lives, as they turn from sinful, harmful, dangerous lives to lives of service to him and to other people.

There is a big picture of this in the Old Testament. God called Abraham and set him apart to be the ancestor of a people set apart for God to bring the Savior into the world. They were set apart by their religious laws, their not intermarrying with those around them, their separate lives. This kept God's people pure, relatively, until the Savior came; it also pictured how God's people are set apart in this world.

Jesus wants his disciples to be holy, set apart, by their faith and life. They were sanctified, that is, made holy, through the truth, yet another word for God's word.

The more we hear, read, study, and meditate on God's truth, the more we will be set apart in this world, you might even say, the more we will feel out of place with this world and out of tune with people around us. It starts with becoming more and more assured of our status, our holy status, before God: we are his children with an eternal home to look forward to. Think of all the people in the world who do not have this, who have no purpose, who are unsure, who fear death. It also means our lives change as we become more loving and more caring as we realize God is fighting for us. It means our attitudes change, we recognize many things accepted in this world as being sinful, angering God, and harming the people who commit them. It is good to pray to be set apart, sanctified through God's truth.

CONCLUSION

As we look forward to the part of the Church Year where we learn more about how God's people live and act in this world, let us learn to pray for what Jesus requested for this disciples: Oneness in faith, joy within us, protection from the evil one, and holiness in this world. Lord, grant our request. Amen.