

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
January 11, 2015

Lesson Text: John 17:6-21

Lesson Title: Jesus' Prayer for His Disciples

Introduction

John 17 is without question one of the greatest chapters in the Bible. Traditionally, it has been called "The High Priestly Prayer." Transitionally, it marks the end of Jesus' earthly ministry and begins His intercessory ministry. This chapter is divided into three parts: First, Jesus prays for Himself (John 17:1-5). Second, Jesus prays for the apostles (John 17:6-19). Third, Jesus prays for all believers (John 17:20-26). Our focus in this study is on Jesus' prayer for His disciples.

Leonard Griffith, in his book, "The Eternal Legacy," makes a point that people reveal themselves in their prayers. In other words, if people are completely honest, they will express to God those things nearest and dearest to their hearts. Why is that true? Because biblical prayer is honest communication with God. And there is no greater example of an honest heart in prayer than when Jesus prayed for His disciples.

To the eyes of faith Jesus' prayer becomes like a window through which we see the very heart of our Savior. The sacred words and thoughts of this prayer reveal both the mind and heart of our Lord. It communicates his great love for his own. It also teaches all of us how to pray for one another and the world.

Jesus Prays Intentionally for His Disciples (John 17:6-10)

As Christ moves toward the cross, his mind turns in the direction of the eleven apostles and the few other disciples who followed him. His thoughts are directed toward their well-being in the face of his coming suffering and death. These men are going to be called upon to do the impossible and they need the help and strength of the heavenly Father.

Jesus is not just praying to be praying. These are special men, chosen men, men of faith who had believed what he revealed to them about the Father and salvation.

Verse 6

"I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word."

Talking to the Father, Jesus prays, “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world...” Christ “manifested” or “made the name of the Father appear” to these men who would have otherwise never known God. These disciples were men enlightened by the truth. Theirs was a knowledge unattainable by human intellect. Men can learn medicine, science, mathematics, history and a multitude of other things in this life but they will never know God without knowing Him through the work of Jesus Christ.

When Christ said “manifested thy name,” he was speaking about the character of God. Jesus had revealed the true character of God to these men. These men were “given to Jesus” by the Father. They belonged to the Father. Jesus said, “Thine they were.” It was God in his matchless and sovereign grace who gave these disciples to be followers of Christ.

“Thou gavest them me” indicates that these disciples were a love gift to from God the Father to God the Son. They belonged where they were because God had given them to His Son. Those of us saved by grace are also a love gift from God the Father to God the Son. It’s a blessed thought to know that we belong to Christ because the Father gave us to Him.

“And they have kept thy word” is the main difference between these disciples and the rest of the multitude that followed Jesus. As long as Christ worked miracles and provided food the crowds followed. But when it came time for obedience, the crowd thinned out! That’s still true today. Obedience is still a distinguishing mark of true Christians.

Verse 7-8

“Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.”

These disciples for whom Christ prayed were not only chosen men, they were also men of faith. Jesus told the Father, “...they have believed that thou didst send me.” They “received the words” that Christ spoke unto them. The word “received” means “to take hold of what is offered, to seize, or to grasp.” That may seem insignificant to us today but that is still the greatest thing that can be said about anyone in any generation (John 6:29). To “believe” that God the Father sent His only begotten Son into the world is indeed miraculous! And these men “believed.” “Believed” means “faith, trust.”

“They have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee” means that these disciples knew that what they knew about Christ had come from God. These disciples believed Christ was God in the flesh which is

essential for salvation. Their faith is real and Christ asks the Father to take care of them. These men were still imperfect men, but their knowledge and belief was enough to enable them to go out in Jesus' name with the message of salvation to all the world. That being true, they are in need of Jesus' prayer.

Verse 9-10

“I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them.”

“Them” of course are Jesus' disciples. Jesus did “not” pray “for the world.” That doesn't mean that Jesus doesn't love the world or that he isn't concerned for the world. What it does mean is that Christ's great ministry of prayer is limited for the most part to believers. But before you jump to a conclusion that Jesus doesn't love sinners, ask yourself this question. What better way for sinners to be loved and told about salvation than through believers? In praying “for them which thou has given me,” Jesus is actually praying for a work among the lost.

“And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them” makes it crystal clear that Christ's disciples are God's personal possession. If you had looked at that little group of disciples you would have probably laughed at the possibility of them doing anything for the Lord. And that is the way the world looks at believers today. But praise the Lord, we who belong to Christ and we belong to God. There is more to God's children than this world will ever recognize. And that is why Jesus intercedes for us today!

“And I am glorified in them” is both amazing and humbling. Jesus is about to go to the cross, die, rise the third day, and then ascend back to the Father in forty days. Since Jesus is about to go back to the Father, the only way he can be glorified is in and through his disciples. Jesus is praying for his disciples and taking care of them because He wants to be glorified in them.

Note: If the world is going to see the glory of God, they will see it in us. So, don't fall apart when trouble comes your way. God is a loving Father who purposefully is working in your life in order to glorify His Son through you.

Jesus Prays Specifically for His Disciples (John 17:11-21)

An understanding of what Christ prayed for specifically should encourage and challenge us in our Christian living.

1) Jesus Prayed Specifically for His Disciples (John 17:11-19)

Verse 11

“And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.”

The words “Holy Father” set the tone for this part of Jesus’ prayer. This is the only place in the Bible where this expression appears. Jesus is about to contrast the “Holy Father” with the wicked world in which he is leaving his disciples. “Holy” means “separate.” God the Father is “holy” and thus able to separate or keep the disciples separate from this evil world.

“And now I am no more in the world” means Jesus is about to die and return to the Father. He will no longer be with his disciples. The “world” in John’s Gospel, is that system, whether political, social, cultural, or spiritual. “These,” meaning his disciples, “are in the world.” They will continue to live in the world system after Jesus returns to His Father. During Jesus’ earthly ministry he had kept his disciples and protected them, but now he is going away and he commits them to the protective care of his Father.

“Keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me” is Jesus’ request to the Father to protect the disciples morally and spiritually. The word “keep” means “to guard or keep an eye upon.” Jesus is praying for the Father to do divine surveillance upon these vulnerable disciples.

How does God protect us in the wicked world system? He “keeps” us “through his own name.” God’s “name” is everything He is. So Jesus prays that the disciples would be kept by the total character and nature of God. And the result of that would be that the disciples would “be one” just as God the Father and Jesus are one.

Note: So many disciples are so worldly that you can’t tell them apart from the world. Christians are chosen out of the world and it is ridiculous to go back into the world and confuse the issue.

Verse 12

“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.”

Jesus repeats what he has just prayed in verse 11, “While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept...” Jesus always came to the rescue of his disciples when they were in danger or faced with temptation. A great example of Jesus’ protection of his disciples is seen in John 18 where the Roman soldiers came to arrest Jesus. Peter’s attempt to behead a Roman soldier could have resulted in death for all Jesus’ followers had not Jesus spoken and calmed the situation.

Jesus “kept” everyone that the Father had given him in salvation. “None of them is lost.” Jesus never loses one soul that the Father gave him for salvation (John 6:39). There is no such thing as a believer ever being saved and lost again. That can’t happen according to the Bible. And to say otherwise is to question Jesus when he said, “None of them is lost.” But then someone might ask about “the son of perdition” which of course is a reference to Judas Iscariot. When Jesus said, “but the son of perdition” is he saying he had Judas at one time but lost him? The answer is no. Judas was never a true disciple of Jesus. He was a “son of perdition” from birth. “Perdition” means “ruin, loss, damnable, destruction.” The word implies that from birth Judas was headed to perdition, to damnable destruction. In fact, Jesus said, *“The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born. Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said”* (Matthew 26:24-25).

“That the scripture might be fulfilled” is a reference to Psalm 41:9 and Psalm 109:4-13. These psalms prophecy in detail the betrayal of Judas Iscariot. That was all in the plan of God. Jesus knew before the foundation of the world that Judas was a betrayer and would never be a true disciple of Christ.

Verse 13

“And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.”

“And now come I to thee” means Jesus is going to die and go back to the Father. And he is asking the Father while he is still “in the world” to give his disciples “joy.” The word “joy” is “cheerfulness, delight, gladness.” Jesus prayed specifically that his disciples “might have his joy fulfilled in themselves.” While the disciples had much hardship to face in the coming hours and day, they would ultimately experience “Christ’s joy” for which Jesus prayed.

Jesus wanted the disciples to experience “my joy” or His joy. What was Jesus’ joy? Christ’s “joy” was in knowing that he was in a love relationship with the Father and that the Father was caring for and protecting him. Jesus wanted his disciples to experience the same gladness he experienced that was essentially knowledge that he was loved and cared for by the Father.

Verse 14

“I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”

Again, Jesus prayed for the disciples protection while they were in the “world.”

Because the disciples were not part of the world system they were hated by the world. Presently, the “world” is Satan’s domain and is always hostile towards believers. This hostility may break out in *temptation* or *persecution*. A worldly Christian is a degrader of Jesus Christ because Christ said, “I am not of the world.” Christ needs us in this world to be salt and light so He prays that we be kept from the evil one, Satan.

Verse 15

“I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.”

Jesus doesn’t pray that the disciples be removed from the “world.” Jesus never prayed that His disciples might find an escape from the difficulties of life. But He did pray that the Father would “keep them from the evil.” He prayed for their victory.

Question: Have you stopped to think about how many evil things in life you have been kept from because of Jesus’ prayer?

Verse 16-19

“They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.”

In these verses Jesus prays for the sanctification of the disciples. Don’t let the word sanctification scare you. It is a biblical term. First, Jesus said, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” That means that neither Jesus nor his disciples belonged to the current world system. Second, “sanctify” means “to make holy, set apart.” To be sanctified does not mean that one becomes a “holier-than-thou” type of person who has reached sinless perfection. For the disciples to be “sanctified” would be they would be “set apart” for the Lord’s service. Third, the source of their sanctification would be “thy truth,” or God’s Word. Everything God’s Word has to say is true. The word of God has a transforming power about it that separates the believer from all that is false, evil, and unholy. Fourth, the disciples needed sanctification because just as the Father “sent” Jesus “into the world,” Jesus “also sent them into the world.”

“And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth” is Christ speaking of consecrating or setting apart himself to do the Father’s will. Certainly Jesus did not “sanctify” himself because of sin for he was perfect. Rather, for the benefit of his disciples they witnessed him consecrate and dedicate himself to the work the Father sent him to do.

2) Jesus Prayed Specifically for All Believers (John 17:20-21)

Verse 20-21

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

In the first part of Jesus’ prayer, Jesus was thinking primarily of those men standing around him. But now he looks across the future years and sees a great multitude of people who have trusted him for salvation in part because of the witness of the first disciples for whom Jesus prayed. That’s why he said, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.”

“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us” is Jesus’ prayer for the unity of his church. Jesus knew the lost world would not be won to Christ through the political power of the church. The “world” would only “believe” God had sent Jesus into the world as they watched the church function “as one.”

What kind of “oneness” is Jesus praying for? Does he want us to all agree on everything? No. Jesus knew the necessary divisions that would exist throughout the centuries in his church. He knew that our sinfulness would not allow us all to agree on every doctrine or topic of concern. Jesus is here praying for any Bible believing local church that preaches and teaches salvation by grace. He is praying for peace and unity within these local congregations of people. And when the sinner looks on that local church or enters the door of that local church, they will see that these people should not, would not, and could not be gathered together in worship unless something miraculous had taken place. The results is that the sinner, because of the churches unity, will sense Christ in the midst of his people, and they will call upon the name of the Lord and be saved.

Conclusion

How would you feel if you could, at this very moment, have Jesus bow beside you or take you by the hand and pray for you? What would it do to you if you could actually hear Jesus call your name out to God the Father in prayer? Well, that will never happen in this life, but it actually did for the disciples. And it changed their lives.

Although we can’t hear or see Christ pray for us, know that he is this very moment praying for us. He’s praying about who we are, were we are, and what

is happening in our lives. He's praying for our protection, our sanctification and our unity. Yes, Jesus told the Father, "I pray for them" (John 17:9). And he also told the Father, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word" (John 17:20). Praise the Lord that's us!

Amen.