

JESUS PRAYED 2

“DON'T TAKE THEM OUT OF THE WORLD... BUT PROTECT THEM”

Have you ever been lost?

I have, well I wasn't actually lost, I knew exactly where I was, it's just that it was 2am and I was smack in the middle of the bush and I had no idea of how to get to where I wanted to be and the others in the group had no idea where I was – so you must realise that I wasn't lost, the rest of the group was lost...you're right, I was lost.

Anyway it was dense bush and I couldn't see a thing, no horizon, no landmarks, no moon. I wandered around for 15 minutes trying to find the track before getting cramp in both legs. I had just spent the previous 4 hours crawling through caves. I had got separated from the rest of the group (that is another story) and was exhausted. I yelled a bit you know the controlled – hello – is anybody there? No joy, no answer, so I resorted to plan B and screamed like a girl – still no answer. I decided to sit down and relax, rule number one: when lost stay where you are. About an hour later I hear a car go past on the nearby road about 2-300 metres away, so I break rule number one and head for the sound and discover half way up a hill and no chance of finding my way back, that the noise had bounced off a hill.

Another hour of walking up the hill, I found a fence and I followed it down to the road and I was found by the rest of the group at about 5 am who were just driving out to call the police in.

There are times in life when you recognise that it would be good for someone to be praying for you. It may be times of danger or of illness or of temptation or of conflict or of indecision or of discouragement.

Last week we started looking at Jesus prayer when he was with his disciples just hours before the cross. Jesus knew that his disciples were soon to face the devastation of His crucifixion, and then the joy of His resurrection and finally the uncertainty of life without the ascended Jesus. The disciples were being entrusted with a mission to change the world. Jesus is very conscious that their only hope of success was through supernatural intervention and help. And so after expressing some of his concerns for himself to his Father (John 17:1-5) we looked at this last week, he moves on to what is known as his “High Priestly” prayer, and prays for his disciples (v6-19).

What would you have prayed for people about to enter such an uncertain future? With time being short, we can be sure that this was not a waffling, mindless prayer. Jesus gets straight to the point and as you study what he says you find that he makes 3 very specific requests for his disciples (v 11, 15, 17). He then summarizes his mission for them in a statement in v 18.

So we'll look at Jesus' prayer and mission for his disciples as crunch time dawned...

John 17:6-19

6 "I have revealed you to the ones you gave me from this world. They were always yours. You gave them to me, and they have kept your word. **7** Now they know that everything I have is a gift from you, **8** for I have passed on to them the message you gave me. They accepted it and know that I came from you, and they believe you sent me.

9 "My prayer is not for the world, but for those you have given me, because they belong to you. **10** All who are mine belong to you, and you have given them to me, so they bring me glory. **11** Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name; now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are. **12** During my time here, I protected them by the power of the name you gave me. I guarded them so that not one was lost, except the one headed for destruction, as the Scriptures foretold.

13 "Now I am coming to you. I told them many things while I was with them in this world so they would be filled with my joy. **14** I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. **15** I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. **16** They do not belong to this world any more than I do. **17** Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. **18** Just as

you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. 19 And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth.

REQUEST 1: KEEP THEM AND CARE FOR THEM (V11)

Jesus starts by entrusting his disciples to God. There is no safer nor wiser prayer. Jesus knew that during his earthly ministry he had been able to look out for his disciples. There were times when they squabbled with each other, made unwise decisions, doubted, were in danger... It never mattered. Jesus was close at hand and could sort it out. Now it would be different. Though Jesus had told his disciples that he would continue to be present with them through the Holy Spirit (John chps 14-16), he knows that a new era is dawning. It will not be the same as it was before. And so he prays the prayer that all who love others have to pray at some time, and entrusts them into the Father's keeping.

If you are a parent, you'll know all about it. Whether it was your child's first day at school or when they announced that they would be leaving home for good or when you left your daughter at the marriage altar... or as they take on the responsibility of parenting themselves, at some stage you've realized you have to open your hands and let them go. But we can entrust them into God's hands. His are the safest...

To be kept and cared for... it's a very tender request. It's the sort you'd make for little children if you were no longer able to look after them – or for elderly parents no longer able to fend for themselves. It reminds us of the loving care Jesus had for his disciples, and of the gentle love he has for us as well.

REQUEST 2: DON'T TAKE THEM OUT OF THE WORLD, BUT KEEP THEM SAFE FROM THE EVIL ONE (V15)

In some ways the second request is similar to the first but has a little twist. The safety and care Jesus asks the Father to provide for the disciples is not of the "wrap them up in cotton wool" variety. To the contrary, Jesus is very firm in v 15 that he does not want the Father to take the disciples out of the world, either literally through their death or figuratively through their being sidelined into irrelevance.

But Jesus did feel it was important to pray that they would be kept safe from the evil one.

Notice whom Jesus prayed we will be safe from.

- In the first instance, he does not pray that we will be kept safe from death, for we must all die sometime and death is the route through which we are permanently reunited with God. If he had prayed that they would be kept safe from premature death you could only conclude it met with a resounding “no!” Of the disciples (other than Judas Iscariot), only John did not die a martyr’s death... and his lot as prisoner on the island of Patmos wasn’t really better!
- Nor does Jesus pray that we will be kept safe from all danger. Anyone who knows the history of the world’s missionary movements knows that being a Christian has never been a guarantee against that. In fact in the early years of missionaries setting out from Britain, it was calculated that once they set sail their average life expectancy dropped to a mere two years. Most never made it back. Some of it was danger from the locals, a huge amount was the danger of previously unknown tropical diseases.

But Jesus does pray that they will be kept safe from the evil one. This is where Jesus locates the real danger facing the disciples. They would have physical safety and well-being for as long as God deemed it necessary and appropriate. But the greatest risk is that Satan would lead them into evil. The lure of evil has always been very real.

One of the worrying things in our time is how lightly we treat the risk of lapsing into evil. Perhaps it is because we have caricatured sin as anything that’s fun... or maybe it’s the ridiculous picture we have of Satan as being a red devil complete with fork and horns.

Evil in the Bible is usually subtle. It’s about pride, doubt, despair, pettiness, a critical spirit – those things sound all a bit common. It is the pressure to call lust, love; selfishness, self-fulfillment; half-heartedness, balance... Jesus prays that his disciples will be protected from these temptations.

REQUEST 3: MAKE THEM PURE AND HOLY BY TEACHING THEM YOUR WORDS OF TRUTH (V17)

If we are to be kept safe from evil it will never be enough to be passive about it. Simply avoiding evil is not enough to make us good. The best antidote to the work of Satan is to be made pure and holy, or, as the NIV puts it, to be sanctified by God’s truth (v17).

Notice the interesting link Jesus makes between sanctification and revelation...

To be **sanctified** means to be made holy, or to be set apart for God. Our goal as Christians is that we should be sanctified or made holy by being totally available for God.

For some reason people think being sanctified or being holy is about being perfect, that is not the case. In actual fact it's not a hard concept to grasp... I am sure you have all been in this situation, you arrive early at some big event in order to get a good seats and so that you can all sit together as friends or family and then wait. And as always someone needs to go to the loo, another get a drink, or food, someone else goes to say hello to someone else or just off for a short stroll.

And as the place fills up, many try to sit in 'your seats', but each time you have to fend them off with a "sorry, these seats are taken". If you wanted to be more theological about it you could say, "sorry, these seat are sanctified" or "these seats are holy", because in the end all that sanctification or holy means is "reserved for someone else". That "someone" is God.

Revelation means to uncover that which was previously hidden. Scripture is God's revelation to us because without it we would not have known what God wanted from us.

Put that together and you realize that in v 17 "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" Jesus is saying: "Make them fully yours by showing them your plan and purpose" or "Help them to be reserved for you by giving them insight into your truth."

The implications are staggering. If you struggle to be obedient or loyal to God, it could be that you have a vision problem and aren't seeing the plan and purpose of God correctly.

I have struggled to think of a suitable illustration to help explain what I mean. I don't know if you have ever had a holiday, either camping or renting a basic kiwi bach. It came highly recommended by friends, a magical place and you have turned up when the weather was pretty bad, rain, wind, overcast. It looked a bleak and unpromising place, everyone is a bit disappointed, your expectations may have been a bit high, you think you would have been better off staying at home.

But then the next day it clears up. The stunning beauty of the place is suddenly revealed. You see what was always there...and glad to be there and enjoying it.

My point... when we see how beautiful God's plan and purpose is we will want to be a part of it. Being "reserved for God" will be seen as a privilege. Our fears will disappear.

Jesus' prayer then is simply that we will be pure and holy (sanctified) by being given an insight into the truth of God. He knows that when we catch a vision of what God is really like and the wonder of His plan, we will be delighted to serve and follow Him alone.

STATEMENT: I AM SENDING THEM INTO THE WORLD (V18)

If you read v9 in some ways it seems a little harsh "My prayer is not for the world, but for those you have given me". Does it mean that Jesus is disinterested in the plight of those who don't know him? V18 puts things into fuller perspective. Jesus' is passionate about the needs of the world, but he plans to touch the world through his disciples. He sends them out into the world as his representatives.

A key part of God's strategy in showing love to the world is by sending his disciples into it. If you look at history you soon discover this is true. While many belittle the churches role in history, you can soon call their bluff...

Hear is something to think about in your spare time. Rate how much or how little each country been influenced by Christianity in their history. Then ask yourself: "Which countries have the greatest freedoms? Which countries would I most like to live in? Which countries have the largest numbers of migrants knocking at their doors?" It's not hard to see the links! The truth is that God has blessed the world through sending his people into it. As the church has fared over time, so has the society fared.

Jesus prayed that his disciples would be kept and cared for; safeguarded from the lure of evil; given such a vision of the truth and wonder of God that being reserved for Him would be easy; and that they would show the world God's compassion and love. His prayer was answered for those disciples... May it be so for us as well...

Video - Do something https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_RjndG0IX8