

What Jesus Prays For You

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[0 : 00] Well, today we are returning to our study on John's Gospel. We were studying John throughout the whole of last year and just before Christmas we reached the end of chapter 16.

We took a wee break in January, February, but today we were gonna come back to it and we'll continue on now until we finish it. We've come to John chapter 17 and we're going to read again from John 17 verse nine, where Jesus said, I'm praying for them.

I'm not praying for the world, but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. This is one of the most remarkable chapters in the whole Bible.

As Murdoch said, it's known as Jesus' high priestly prayer. And high priestly, that phrase captures the fact that Jesus is the great high priest.

Now what that means is that Jesus has come to represent us before God. He's come to open the way for us to have access to God.

[1 : 03] And now he intercedes for us as the mediator between God and humanity. In other words, the image I always have is the image of a bridge, the one that gives us access and a way to God.

So high priestly captures all of that. And then the fact that it's a prayer captures the fact that this chapter is recording an amazing moment when Jesus speaks to his father.

And we have this quite astonishing insight into the relationship that there is between God the Father and God the Son. And in that conversation, so much is revealed about what Jesus wants for his people, about what Jesus wants for you.

And there is, for that reason, there's so much in this chapter. We could spend weeks here. I would love to preach a sermon on every verse in this chapter, but if we do that, we'll never finish, John. Instead, we're just gonna do two sermons, one this morning and one this evening, for both services we're gonna be in John chapter 17. And today in these two services, I want to look at two very simple things that this chapter reveals.

[2 : 16] In this prayer, Jesus says a lot about his people. In other words, if you're a Christian or if you become a Christian, Jesus says a lot of things in this chapter about you.

And we're gonna look at that together tonight. This morning, we're going to look at what Jesus prays for his people. So tonight, it's what Jesus says about his people.

This morning, it's what Jesus prays for his people. That's our title, what Jesus prays for you. And we're gonna look at four key petitions that this chapter contains.

Verse 11, Jesus says, keep them in your name. In verse 15, he prays keep them from the evil one. In verse 17, he prays sanctify them in the truth. And in verse 24, he prays that they might be with me.

We're simplest and yet I will look at each of these four. I want to just start with the simplest and yet I think the most profound truth of all that this reveals.

[3 : 19] This chapter is telling us that Jesus prays for you. God the son talks to God the father about you.

He asks things for you. He pleads for you. He pours out his heart to his father about you.

And it's really important for us to remember that John 17 is not a one-off event. It's actually a glimpse into something that Jesus continues to do to this day.

The rest of the New Testament speaks about that. The fact that Jesus is continually interceding for his people. You see it in Romans 8-4. Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that.

He's raised, he's at the right hand of God, interceding for us. That's the same language, that language of praying for us, of being the mediator for us. Hebrews 7, 25 says the same thing.

[4 : 19] He always lives to make intercession for his people. And it's so interesting in both these verses there's a connection between the resurrection and the intercession.

One of the key reasons why Jesus rose from the dead is one of the key reasons why the Bible emphasizes that so much is the fact that he continues to intercede for you.

He never stops praying for you. And that means that you are never, ever forgotten. I think everybody here would agree how easy it is to forget things, how scarily easy it is to forget things. I can't go into Tesco without a text message from you telling me what to buy because I can't remember more than three things. Even three is a challenge sometimes. It's scary how easy it is to forget things. It's even more scary how easy it is to forget people.

People who've come into our lives, people we've enjoyed friendship with, people who face huge challenges, people that we want to help, and yet in all the busyness of life, we forget about them.

[5 : 32] That never happens with Jesus. He never forgets you. He can't forget you. He never stops praying for you.

The cross was a stunning monumental one-off event, but it was never just about what Jesus did for you then. It's also about what Jesus is doing for you now.

And the gospel is amazing because in the gospel, Jesus didn't just lay down his life for you. He is also pouring out his heart for you.

There are so many voices today that are crying out to you. You've got politicians crying out for your vote, employers demanding more and more of your effort.

You've got social media nagging you for your attention. And then there's the voice of our own insecurities telling us that we are a failure. So many voices crying out to us.

[6 : 32] Jesus is so different because he's not crying out to you with a whole set of demands and expectations that you've got to live up to. He's crying out for you.

Jesus prays for you. And that will never stop being utterly amazing. But what does he pray?

Well, in this chapter, we see four things that I want to look at one by one. The first is his prayer to keep them in your name. You see that in John 17, 11.

He says, just Father, keep them in your name. Now that phrase, keep them is a beautiful phrase. Speaks of protection, speaks of preservation. We're going to look at it in a bit more detail in the second point because it comes up again.

What I want to focus on just now is the language that Jesus uses here about being kept in God's name. Now that's a phrase you see happening again and again in the Bible, it's a phrase that we struggle to see the impact of or the importance of when we talk about being kept in God's name.

[7 : 37] Because today we just think of names in terms of what someone's called. That's just your names, what you're known as. And it's almost like our clothes or our car or our address. It's just something that we have, something we might like, something we might not like.

It's not that big a deal today. In the Bible, it was a big deal. Your name captures who you really are. It speaks of your character, your reputation, your purpose, your reliability, your possessions, your standing. And so when the Bible talks about having a good name, it doesn't mean having a good name as in the word.

We've got loads of good nicknames in Lewis, but that's not really what we're meaning here. It's talking about the person. It's talking about who they are, what they stand for, how they live.

And I think it would all hit home for us more today if we recognized that the Bible uses the word, the term name, in the way that we today would use the term identity.

[8 : 38] Identity has become an incredibly important word in our culture today. Because when we use that word, we're not just talking about the details on your passport or your driver's license.

We're talking about what we identify as. We're talking about what we really are as a person. And that's why you can see today that to attack somebody's identity, to undermine it, to question it, is viewed as a very, very serious and offensive thing to do in our society today.

And I think that if we recognize that, it helps us to understand the impact of what Jesus is saying here, because he is saying, when he is saying to his father, keep them in your name, he's saying, keep them in your identity.

Keep them identified in you. May they always know that what they are in you is what they really are.

And so when Jesus is praying for you, he's saying, keep them bound to who they really are. And that has some very important implications. First, it reminds us that as Christians, if you're a Christian, if you become a Christian, the place where we need to always find our identity is in a relationship with God.

[9 : 59] And in that little summary of my own journey to faith that I gave at the start, before becoming a Christian, my identity was grounded so much in how I was thought of by my friends at school or how well I did at football or how well I did at school or all these things that ultimately don't really matter.

And when we come to faith in Jesus, our identity becomes grounded in the fact that God is our father, that he loves us forever.

He is the ultimate definer of our identity. So if you ask the question, who are you? What are you? Biblically, the answer to that question is that you're his creation.

You're made by him. You're made for him. And yes, sin has disrupted and spoiled that. But the message of the gospel is the fact that our ultimate well-being is dependent on whether or not we rebel against that through identity or whether we return to it through Jesus.

And if you do that, if we do put our faith in Jesus, then we can ground our identity, not in our jobs, not in our salary, not in our wealth, not in our reputation, not in our status, not in our sexuality, not in our politics, but in the fact that our father loves us with his children, and he's put his name on us.

[11 : 21] But we can actually, I think, push it even a bit deeper than that when we talk about this whole idea of being kept in God's name. Not only do we ground our identity on our relationship with God, but the language that Jesus is using here is pointing us to the fact that we are the only ones who are in the fact that God has given us the incredible privilege whereby his identity is forever to involve us.

Now, we have to be a little bit careful when we speak in those terms, because when we say that we're not saying that God is dependent on us, we're not saying that God needs us, or that God is sort of kind of empty without us.

One of the most basic defining characteristics of God is that he's self-sufficient, he's independent of everything else. So we're not saying that God can't function without us, that's not what we mean. What we mean is that by God's grace in his generosity, he gives us a place in his name, and he keeps us there.

Maybe we can put it like this. If you imagine that God had a passport, on the photo page, you would be told that the eternal God, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, you would be told that he is utterly self-sufficient, he alone is God, he's complete, he's perfect.

[12 : 50] God's identity is on that photo page as the one and only true God. But in the Gospel, if you put your trust in Jesus, you are stamped on the pages of that passport, and you will never be erased.

And if a passport is the great identity document, then Jesus is telling us here that God's passport includes you. And it's either a stamp in that passport with your name on it, or a space waiting for you to put your trust in him.

All of that means that this concept of name, this sense of identity, is bringing a connection, which is why the very next thing that Jesus says is that he speaks about being kept in his name, that they may be one even as we are one.

That language of oneness is the word of God. We are one, that language of oneness is all about connection. And so you see that in these verses. Jesus has been given the name, we are given the name, we're all connected to Jesus.

You and I and Jesus all have the same father. And the reality of that is pressed home even further in verse 12, where we see that Judas, that's who's been referred to by that language of the Son of Destruction, one of the 12 disciples, Judas, who betrayed Jesus, never had that connection at all.

[14 : 33] Although he maybe looked like it on the outside. And here Jesus is making clear that the fact that Judas betrayed him, turned away from him, and was never really a genuine follower in the first place, was not a failure, it was actually a fulfillment of what the Scriptures had said in the Old Testament.

It's all confirming to us that if we do not ultimately identify with Jesus, if we do not have that connection, then we don't have a place in that family.

And all of that makes sense. All this language of name and identity is talking about who you really are. And there's nothing more important for you to think about.

You've got to think about who you really are. Who you really are before God, who you really are in terms of eternity. And it's not a question of whether or not you're a good or a bad person, we are all a mixture of good and bad.

This is a question about who you love, about who you trust. It's about who you ultimately depend on. And you've got to think about it.

[15 : 48] And if you may be confronted by that, and if God is speaking to you, thinking, I am seeing this, I am seeing that I have got to put my trust in Jesus. What do you need to do? All you need to do is say, Lord, please save me.

I ask this in your name. Jesus prays, keep them in your name. He also prays, keep them from the evil one.

That's not very well positioned arrow, should be right there. He does that in verse 15. He says, I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. And here I want to come back to that phrase, keep them, which we've seen in these two phrases.

And I want you to notice the contrast between the two times that Jesus uses that, because in verse 15, he says, keep them in. And then in verse 15, he says, keep them from.

And those two tiny words are so crucial for capturing the reality of life as a follower of Jesus. We need to be kept in certain things, preserved, continuing on close to Jesus, walking with Him, listening to Him.

[16 : 52] We need to keep in that, but we also need to be kept from certain things, because we can so easily wonder, we can so easily be deceived, we can so easily make some very bad choices.

And all of that is because of the reality of evil and of the devil's desire to destroy us. Now, today, many, many people would have hesitations about what the Bible says about there being an evil one elsewhere, that would be the devil or Satan.

And a lot of people would have hesitations about that, to be honest, a lot of people today would even roll their eyes at that to think, do I really believe in that? Sort of thing today. Well, I want to say to you today that this is actually one of the most important teachings in the whole Bible.

It's teaching us that supernatural evil is real. And there's two reasons why that's absolutely crucial, and these two reasons actually confirm that you actually already believe this, even if you don't think that you do believe this.

First of all, this confirms to us that evil is not an illusion and it's not a social construction. When you look at everything that's going on in the world just now, when you see children caught up in the devastation of war, when you see the desperate suffering brought by disease and injustice, when we are confronted by the agony of death, when we lose people that we love so dearly, when all of that happens, we know that evil is not a social construction.

[18 : 28] We know that evil is not nothing. We know that it is not an illusion. It's not just a socially constructed idea, and it's not just an unfortunate consequence of a world ruled by survival of the fittest.

It is actually wrong, forever and always wrong. So often people suggest that evil is a problem for Christians.

People will say, how can you believe in a God when there's evil? That's always seen as a big problem for Christians. Honestly, evil is a far bigger problem for people who are not Christians and who people who don't hold to a biblical worldview.

Because without belief in a supernatural reality of evil, how on earth can we have an objective, unchanging model standard? How can we say that humans must never crush the weak in order to secure their own survival?

We lose the intellectual basis for morality, the minute we deny this teaching in the Bible. And so it's so important because it confirms to us that evil is a supernatural reality.

[19 : 43] It's not a social construction. It's not an illusion. The second reason is even more important. Belief in the supernatural reality of evil tells you that evil has an ultimate source and it's not you.

And that is so important because without a belief in a supernatural reality of evil, we look at every crime, every act of cruelty and brutality, every injustice in human history, and all we can say is we are the source of that.

And in that situation, evil becomes a thoroughly human pattern of behavior. Or to put it another way, evil becomes natural and normal.

Thank God that the Bible gives us an alternative to that. It tells us that the ultimate source of evil is satanic and evil is a horrific unwanted intrusion into human experience and we long to be delivered from it.

And that's the basis of Jesus's mission and it's the basis of this prayer. We're not made to cultivate evil. We are not made to be slaves to it. We're made to bear the image of God, to be like the God who is utterly holy and pure and good and loving and wise.

[21 : 22] And Jesus has come to defeat evil. He's come to deliver us from evil. And that's why he prays that as we follow him, we will be kept from evil. All of this reminds us that spiritual conflict is real.

We're caught up in a battle between good and evil, between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. That battle is ongoing until Jesus returns. But I want you to notice what he prays. He is not praying that we will be taken out of the world. He's saying, I don't want you hiding from the world. I don't want you avoiding the world. I don't want you isolated from the reality of evil. Instead, he prays that we will be kept. Now, I think there's two sides to that coin of Jesus praying that we will be kept from evil. On the one hand of that coin, one hand, one side, mixed metaphor. She's not trying to say it. He is saying that we need protection. So as we go into the world, as we go to work tomorrow, as we see evil around us, whether on a global scale in the horror of war, or even just by being bullied at work or at school, as we see that we are being reminded that we need protection.

[22 : 36] We need God to keep us. We need to listen to him. We need him to guard us and keep us. That's one side of the coin. But on the other side of the coin, one of the reasons why Jesus wants us, doesn't want to take us out of the world, is because that world which is under the grip of sin, needs to see that there's hope.

That world desperately needs to see that there's hope. And that's such a crucial part of our purpose as a church.

Sometimes Jesus will answer that prayer in John 15 by denying us something that we really want. And that's often the case. Any parent here will know that sometimes we have to be careful.

And that's often the case. Any parent here will know that sometimes you need to deny something that your children really want, because you know it's for their best.

And it's also a reminder that we need this prayer because Satan is subtle. This is one of the more disgusting illustrations that I've chosen to use, but I don't know if any of you ever find a packet of ham at the back of the fridge that's been left there too long.

[23 : 51] It's gone all hairy and disgusting. You know, it doesn't need to tell me not to eat that. She needs to tell me not to eat too much chocolate, too much crisps, all the stuff that's so appealing, but bad for me.

And part of this prayer is reminding us that we need to be kept because the devil is subtle. And so often he can lure us away from God with things that are tempting. It's all reminding us that we need to trust our Father.

Jesus says, Jesus prays for you. He says, keep them from the evil one. Thirdly, and the last year much quicker, verse 17, Jesus says, he prays sanctify them in the truth.

Your word is truth. That word sanctify is one that comes up a lot in the Bible. It is all the language of holiness. And holiness is referring to the idea of being set apart.

And so what Jesus is praying for us here is that we will be sanctified, we'll be set apart. And it's all speaking about the amazing transformation that the gospel brings whereby we are restored and renewed and made more like Jesus.

[25 : 03] And it ties in with the fact that Jesus doesn't want you isolated from the world. He wants you different from it. And that is, I think we'll look at again tonight, it's just such a key part of Christian living.

We are not to cut ourselves off. We are to be out there, but we are to be different in a beautiful way. And what Jesus is reminding us here is that that transformation happens through the word of God. As we read the Bible, God's word, Jesus is praying that God's word would change us. And that's exactly what God's word is seeking to do. As we read it, as we think about it, as we talk about it, it should change us, transform us, and help us to grow.

And it's reminding us that the Christian life is never about being rigid, static, or intransigent. It's a daily journey of repentance, of change, of growth, where we want to see less and less of the rotten fruit of bitterness and selfishness and anger and cruelty and jealousy and arrogance and all the awful stuff that wrecks life.

And instead, we want to see more and more of the fruit of the spirit being cultivated in our lives. And the reason why Jesus wants God's word to do that, the reason why we want God's word to do that, is because it's the truth.

[26 : 25] And is that not what we desperately crave? That our thinking, our behavior, our ethics, our priorities, our dreams would be shaped by the truth?

Or do you want them to be shaped by a lie or by a fantasy? And do you know that so easily happens?

When I was a teenager, the world told me that if I had the right clothes, that if I had the right vocabulary, which usually just involved adding uh to the end of every word when you're from Stornoway, if I had the right attitudes, I would be able to do that.

Um, if I had the right attitudes, if I had the right weekends, then I would find peace and security and joy. But when I was a teenager, the Bible also told me that if I found Jesus, I would find peace and security and joy.

Only one of them was speaking the truth. Which one are you going to listen to? Jesus prays sanctify them in the truth.

[27 : 39] Your word is truth. And then last of all, in verse 24, he prays these amazing words, Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me may be with me where I am.

To see my glory that you've given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. There's so much we could say here, this is one of the most magnificent statements in the whole Bible. Jesus wants you with him.

And please, if you take anything from this service today, please press that truth into your heart, the fact that Jesus wants you with him. But I want to close by noticing that in this verse, we actually find a conflict between our desires and Jesus's desire.

Because when we look around at people in our lives who we love so much, and especially when we are confronted with the reality of old age, or the reality of illness, we look at these people that we love and we just want them to stay with us.

And that's why we will pray earnestly when people are ill, because we just want them to stay with us.

[29 : 00] But Jesus wants them with him. And there's a tension and a conflict there. But the mistake that we make is this.

In our desperate desire for people not to die, all we are ever praying for is a postponement.

We're praying for a postponement. But with Jesus, he's praying for the permanent. Because Jesus prays from the perspective of the other side of the resurrection, he's praying not on the basis of the postponement of death, but on the basis of the abolition of death.

And that's what the gospel is all about. That's what the cross is all about. That's what he came to do. But the amazing thing, maybe the most amazing thing of all is this, that in order for that prayer to be answered yes, for God to say yes to that prayer, he had to say no to another prayer that Jesus prayed.

Because here in John 17, we're in just the final few hours before Jesus reached the cross. He's left, he's leaving the upper room with the disciples. He's making his way towards the Garden of Gethsemane. And in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was confronted by the overwhelming horror of the cross. And he prayed, Father, if it's possible, please take this cup away. Please don't make me do it. And the Father said no. And the reason he said no to the prayer in Gethsemane is so that he could say yes to this prayer in John 17. Because through the cross, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the way is open for us all to come to him, to find healing, to find forgiveness, to find salvation. And that's the amazing thing about the gospel, for everyone who trusts in Jesus, even if that is the most childlike, simple, basic trust in Jesus, the day will come when God will take us all to be with him where he is safe and secure forever. Amen.