

Title: *Sent, but Kept*

Text: John 17:6-19

When do you pray? When are those moments that you don't really know what else to do but to bow your head and to pray?

We know that Jesus prayed and if he needed to pray we ought to pray. 45 percent of us say we pray whenever the Spirit prompts us, 23 percent at bedtime, 18 percent in the morning, 11 percent during my commute, 1 percent before meals

It's interesting to look at when Jesus prayed. When he was enlisting those men who would be with him and into whom he would pour himself during his three years here on Earth. He withdrew and prayed when they wanted to make him a king and in those times of trial and temptation, he prayed.

Matthew, Mark and Luke all record Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane on the last night of his life. John has a different prayer. We think of the prayer in Matthew 6 as the Lord's prayer. It is the model prayer that he taught his disciples so really, it should be called the disciples' prayer.

The real Lord's Prayer shows up in John 17. It is not Gethsemane, but it shows up in John as that prayer that Jesus prays for His disciples.

If you were in Jesus' place what would you pray for? You'd come to Earth for the purpose of bringing a fallen humanity back into right relationship with God. You've poured yourself into 12 men, one of whom has betrayed you. You know that the hour of your crucifixion is at hand and you will be leaving – you'll be sending your spirit – but even with that power, you know that these guys will have their successes and their failures. All they've got is what you've taught them and you have the expectation that they will take that and will use that to change the world. What do you pray for them?

He knows that it's all on what he taught them and how he's poured himself into them. He also knows that the Holy Spirit will empower them and will be working as well. It's a little like a situation I was in recently when a group of pastors was sitting around talking about different issues we face in our churches and in our ministries. One pastor who is the founding pastor of his church said, "When you're a church planter, if it's bad, you can't blame anybody but yourself." The point of that is to say that Jesus knew that they had what he had taught them. If you're confident in what you've done and how you've led and how you've taught, you can lay your head down on the pillow at night feeling at peace that you've done the best you can do and you can pass the baton.

2000 years later, the baton has been passed to us. What Jesus taught his disciples has been handed down through generation after generation of believers and there are some things that we have gotten well and other things that we have messed up. In spite of it all, 2000 years later there are places on this world where the church of Jesus Christ is thriving as it never has before, and there are

other places on this world where we wring our hands in despair and say, “The church has seen better days.”

We’re in this study of the book *Radical* because I believe that it contains an important message if the church in the west, including the Salem Avenue Baptist Church is once again going to be serious about fulfilling the Great Commission in our generation. That is that the Christian faith is not about our comfort and ease. If we tell someone, “Just ask Jesus in your heart and your problems will all go away,” we’re selling them a bill of goods.

Instead, we should be telling people, you need to invite Jesus Christ into your life because he is the only way for you to be rightly related to God. I am Facebook friends with a young man who is rather outspoken on a lot of things including his Christian faith. He sent a shot across the bow the other night when he made a comment about Mormonism. It triggered a long discussion chain. One person commented that his remarks were trivial, to which I had to reply, No they’re not. They are anything but trivial. How you respond to Jesus Christ will determine your eternity.

I’m leery about trying to change someone’s deeply held opinion through a facebook post, but sometimes, something gets said and I just can’t be silent about it.

Once you’ve come to Jesus Christ and your eternity is secure, you realize that’s no the only reason God had in mind when he saved you. He created you for a purpose and you are morally accountable to him for how you fulfill that purpose in your life. Part of that purpose is to be a partner with Him in his work of bringing people from every language, tribe, people, and nation back to Himself. As such, we engage in spiritual warfare. There are casualties to any war as some who are on the front lines, take the hits. But, there is purpose. There is meaning. There is a sense that my life has counted for God and for eternity and it hasn’t been wasted. Radical discipleship is really throwing yourself fully into that purpose that God has for you and making the commitment in your heart that you’re going to live more for the kingdom of God than anything this world has to offer.

Having said that, what is it that Jesus prays for us? Well, he first prays for himself. In verse 1-6, he prays,

“After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.

³Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

Jesus first prays for himself that he might be glorified so that people might see his glory and receive eternal life through trusting in him. This eternal life, says Jesus, is in knowing God and we know God by knowing Jesus Christ. He’s also saying, “I’ve done what you’ve sent me here to do and now I want to return to you and enjoy the glory of your presence.”

Here we see a picture of Jesus praying. Philip Yancey says,

“As Jesus once prayed for Peter, now he prays for us... In fact, the New Testament's only glimpse of what Jesus is doing right now depicts him at the right hand of God 'interceding for us.' In three years of active ministry, Jesus changed the moral landscape of the planet. For nearly two thousand years since, he has been using another tactic: prayer.

So, in order that we may know God, Jesus first says, “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world.” This is for the purpose of relationship and so that they can one day share in this glorious eternal life forever and ever. If eternal life is found in knowing the one true God and Jesus whom he has sent, then the first purpose of Jesus Christ is to reveal the Father who sent him. He says, “They were yours.” You gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Isn't it interesting that Jesus would give them credit for having obeyed him? We can think of all of the times that our obedience has been less than perfect and we hear so much about the high and holy standards of God that how could it ever be said that we have obeyed?

Jesus is not here giving credit for absolute, perfect obedience. He is acknowledging that for the 11 who remained true to him, they were faithful. They may have had their little bumps in the road, but in their heart, they knew who Jesus was and they wanted to follow him and be with him, and live for him.

He expounds upon that when he says, “I gave them your words and they accepted them.” We talked about this aspect of discipleship a couple of weeks ago – chapter 2 in the book. Discipleship comes through a hunger for the word. Almost a desperation to hear a word from God and know what he says so that we may follow it and live a life of discipleship.

Jesus says, “I pray for them. I'm not praying for the world.” It's not that Jesus is not concerned for the world – he certainly is. He loves the world. He died for the sins of the world. He died so that any person in the world who would come to him and turn to him in faith could be saved. He's not unconcerned with the rest of the world, but perhaps he knows that the key to reaching the rest of the world is the faithful discipleship of those who have placed their faith and their trust in him. He is praying that they would keep their faith and be effective in their witness for him.

Jesus is interceding for us. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says:

A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses. I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me. His face, that hitherto may have been strange and intolerable to me, is transformed in intercession into the countenance of a brother for whom Christ died, the face of a forgiven sinner. This is a happy discovery for the Christian who begins to pray for others.

Next Jesus acknowledges his oneness with the Father. There is a complete mutuality in their sharing. What the Father's is his and what's his is the Father's. He reiterates a theme of John's gospel. He is returning to the Father and he's leaving the disciples in the

world and he is praying for them and he does pray that God will protect us and one of the things that needs to be protected is our unity. It's wonderful to celebrate the unity we can have across denominational lines. There is room to celebrate our unity that there are more things that unite us than divide us even as we allow room for each other's consciences. That's why denominations don't have to be a bad thing if we use them to band together with like-minded believers for the sake of spreading the good news. It's when we think that we're the only ones that denominationalism turns ugly.

What is even more important to be safeguarded is the unity within a local body of believers. It may not have anything to do with doctrine. It may have to do with issues such as philosophy of ministry, which new ministries should have priority for funding and staffing. It could just be clashing personalities and Jesus prays that his followers would be one – that they would have a deep-seated unity that holds them together in spite of all of the stuff that the world may throw at us sometimes. It's not always the world throwing stuff at us, either. Sometimes it's just our own egos and wants and desires getting in the way – the attitude I want what I want.

Jesus then says in verse 12, “While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me.” I've commented before in an earlier sermon a few months back about how I believe that we are too prone to pray for safety and to be concerned for our own safety. By nature, I tend to be a very reflective person and I've given that whole issue a lot of thought over the last few months as I've thought about when to pray for safety and when that should be a legitimate concern and when we're just being too concerned with it.

As our youth went on their trip to South Dakota, I prayed for their safety. That was legitimate. The distinction I've come to and perhaps it's not really that profound, it just took me a while to come to this realization, pray for their safety as they're going. If we weren't going and were sitting home praying for God to keep us safe as we were just sitting around on our blessed assurance because we were too timid and too afraid ever to do anything or to take any risks or chances, that would be illegitimate. I've met some folks before who would tell me all the things that the devil is doing to them and I just wanted to ask, “Why would he waste all his energy going after you? You're not doing anything that be construed as threatening to him. We can think of all of the things to be afraid of that would keep us from being involved in mission. The plane might crash. I don't want to have to fly over water. I might get bitten by poisonous snake. A rhino might charge our vehicle. There could be hostile elements who would taunt and harass us. There may be political unrest. The devil may get mad at us.

Good! I hope we do some things that get the devil mad at us! We can't let any of those things keep us from going hard after the call that God has placed upon our lives. Don't let fear keep you from being involved in mission. Trust that if you're in God's will, he will keep you. If some physical harm does befall you, trust that God has allowed and it will fit into his plan for some greater purpose. Jed and Sally Jezek testified that after a mishap involving one of the children there at White Horse on the reservation, it began to open

up relationships in a way that they had not opened up before. The little boy is going to be fine and we thank God for that.

Jesus says, “I’ve guarded them. I’ve kept them.” They’re mine. The only one that was lost was the one about whom it was prophesied that he would betray me. That word that is used for guard there is the same word that would be used for a phalanx.

Jesus, in verse 13, knew that he was coming to his father. He prayed for his disciples though, that they would know the full measure of his joy. We know that in Scripture, the joy of the Lord is our strength. There are things in life that are tough and there will be opposition and people who hate you for no good reason. That’s because our lives testify – or they ought to – that there is something different about us. And here is the important point to which we have been building this morning. Jesus says, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one.” We have been called to Jesus Christ to fulfill a purpose which goes far beyond our own salvation. Our salvation is so that God will be glorified. The purpose for which we are saved is to glorify God. The calling that he will put upon your life to enter whatever field of endeavor he calls you to is so that his name will be glorified.

Jesus prays, “As you have sent me into the world, I am sending them with the prayer that we will be kept safe from the evil one. Wilbur Chapman, a well-known preacher from an earlier generation said, “It's not the ship in the water but the water in the ship that sinks it. So it's not the Christian in the world but the world in the Christian that constitutes the danger.” To press the analogy further, what good is a ship that’s not in the water? God wants you to be a ship. What good are you if you’re in dry dock?

Sanctify self . . .

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