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#94

“The Reason for Prayer: God’s Help”

John 17:13-19

Introduction

I've been using this new read through the Bible plan this year that I'm starting to really like. Each day of the week it takes you to a different portion of the Bible. So, Sundays I always read from the New Testament Epistles. Monday it's the Pentateuch. Tuesdays are Old Testament history readings. Wednesdays are the Psalms. Thursday, other books of poetry. Fridays are the prophets and Saturday the gospels. The downside is that it can be a little choppy – a week between each section. But the neat thing is to see connections all through the Scriptures. For instance this week I was reading from Numbers about the God's people rebelling against the Lord and then two days later the Psalms for the day were written about that very event. And on Friday there was a fantastic section in Joel about repentance. So it's really been fun.

Now I wanted to bring that up because we return today to our study in Jesus' high priestly prayer, where He is interceding for us. We've already been seeing that this prayer not only shows us what is on Jesus' heart when it comes to us, but also how we can pray better, more God honoring prayers for ourselves and others. In the portion of John 17 before us today, we are going to see that praying for victory over our sin is the greatest thing we can pray for ourselves.

Our natural instincts lead us to pray most often for things that will do us the least amount of

good. Our natural desires lead us to pray for temporal things. And while it is appropriate to pray for our daily needs (Jesus taught us to do so), if our hearts are filled with the spirit of the world, the possessions of the world will do us little good.

This was what I saw in Numbers and Psalms this week. The people of God craved the pleasantries of the world without any connectivity to the things of God. After all God had done to rescue and save His people, Psalm 106 makes this frightening revelation. *They quickly forgot His works; They did not wait for His counsel, But craved intensely in the wilderness, And tempted God in the desert. So He gave them their request, But sent leanness to their souls.*

Today we want to see how to truly pray for God's help.

[John 17:13-19]

In the first half of this prayer we learned that our prayers are to be consumed with God's glory. But starting here, we begin to see how to put specific requests to that passion. And the thing that first comes to Jesus' mind might surprise you. What do you think is of great importance to Jesus when He prays for you? Would you be startled to learn that He cares deeply about your joy? But that's why Jesus says He is praying for you. *But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.* He doesn't say He prays for you so that you will be more holy or more obedient or more faithful or more serious or more theological. He says He comes to the Father so that you will be more joyful. It's sometimes hard for us to realize and believe that Jesus cares about your happiness and peace and satisfaction. It

doesn't mean he doesn't care about those other things (holiness, obedience, etc.)

And isn't it interesting that the world – who is always holding forth the promise of these very things – is actually fighting against us and hating us for these things? Jesus wants our joy; the world wants our misery. The solution would seem to be simple; get us out of the world. But Jesus is not ready for that yet. And so He prays for you. And what does He pray?

I. He prays for your **Deliverance from Evil.**

Verse 15 - *I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.* This word evil one, is really just the word evil. It's the same word Jesus used in the Lord's Prayer. *Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.* It can imply the evil one, but it basically just means whatever is sinful and wicked.

If it's true that Jesus has a great desire for your joy and happiness, isn't it crucial that we see a connection between the presence of sin in our life and our unhappiness? This is at the heart of temptation. What is temptation? It's an appeal to your feelings or beliefs that doing something wrong will actually make you feel better and make you happier.

Back in Psalm 106, which I was reading earlier this week, God outlines Israel's fall into sin and evil. Turn to that Psalm. This is that Psalm that says *He gave them their requests but sent leanness to their soul* (vs.15). But what I want you to see is the progression of the people into worldliness and evil.

- vs 19 – worshipped idols.
- vs. 21 – they forgot their salvation
- vs. 24 – they didn't believe His Word

- vs. 25 – they didn't listen to His voice

That's just a few of the ways they began to neglect the means of joy God had provided them. God's grace comes to us when we worship Him; when we remember our salvation; when we embrace His future promises in faith; and when we listen to His voice. Because they refused themselves these means of grace, they began to look other places for joy.

So look at the results in verse 35. *They mingled with the nations and learned their practices.* And so finally, in verse 41 we see the outcome. *God gave them into the hand of the nations.* Or you might say, they became one with the world. Worldliness became their attire.

When Jesus prays for you, He prays that you would be kept from evil. But how can you escape the evil that surrounds you in the world? If Jesus is not yet ready to take you to the place He is preparing for you in heaven, how can you be free from evil? When you are confronted with evil, there are different ways you can and should respond.

1. Stand Firm. When it comes to the truth of God's Word and the message of the gospel, we should never flee. Paul wrote in Galatians 5:1, *It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.* The thing that enslaves us is falsehood. Remember what Jesus said. *You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.* So any desire to overcome evil begins with an uncompromising commitment to the Word of God.

2. Resist. James wrote that you are to *resist the devil and he will flee from you.* Since the Satan is an unseen enemy, you can't really flee from Him. But you can resist Him with the promises of God's

Word. That's exactly what Jesus did in His wilderness confrontations with the devil.

3. Flee. We can't flee out of the world, but we can flee many of its enticements. Specifically God tells us when to flee.

- I Cor. 10:14 - *Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.*
- I Tim. 6:11 - *For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But flee from these things, you man of God . . .*
- I Cor. 6:18 - *Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.*
- II Tim 2:22 - *Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.*

[Illustration of former student falling into sin and his life and faith becoming shipwrecked.]

So Jesus is praying for your deliverance from evil. Are you praying for that? Everyday you need to ask God to *lead you not into temptation, but deliver you from evil*. This is one of the keys to your joy. If you want to have joy and happiness, believe what Jesus says here. You will not be happy if you live in sin.

But there is more. The absence of evil is not enough. Jesus not only prays for you deliverance from evil . . .

II. Jesus prays for your **Development of Holiness**.

Verse 17 gives us the second specific request in this section. *Sanctify them in truth*. Now we come across this word sanctify often in the Bible. So you likely know the word means *to be set apart, holy*,

pure, clean, dedicated or consecrated to the Lord.

There are two things in the context that you need to particularly be aware of.

1. If you are in Christ, you are sanctified.

This is the essence of what verse 16 is saying. *They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*

In other words, if you are a Christian, your citizenship, your place, your status is that you are set apart and different from those who are not in Christ. And the reason is simply the reality of the gospel. When you became a Christian, you became a new creature. Your sin was put on Christ and His righteousness or His holiness was put on you.

That's why Paul could write to the church in Corinth that was struggling with the practical issues of living in holiness and address them as saints – literally, *sanctified ones*. In I Corinthians 6:11, after recounting many of the particular evils of their past he wrote, *Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*

It's important to understand your position in Christ. That's the only way we can make sense of verse 19 where Jesus says He sanctifies Himself. Certainly He didn't need to overcome sin and become more holy. But He was holy and therefore we can be holy.

2. If you are in Christ, you need to be sanctified.

If this seems contradictory, just remember that while we are accepted by God on the basis of Christ's righteousness, we will not experience perfect holiness until we are in heaven. And so places like I Peter 1:14-16 say, *As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you,*

be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.

So we have the need to be sanctified and the ability or power to be sanctified because we are sanctified.

So how does it happen? Again Jesus tells us. *Sanctify them in truth, Thy Word is truth.* You are not going to be sanctified apart from God’s Word. It’s as simple as that. Sometimes some of you get tired of always being asked about your time in the Word. Sometimes I hear people say that we over simplify things or give trite answers to problems. And while that kind of thing can happen, there is a good reason for us to keep pressing upon each other the need to hear the Word preached, and to read it and study it and memorize it. There is no sanctification apart from the Word.

It doesn’t take long for you students to realize that apart from studying the books and lessons in your classes you’re not going to make good grades. Why do we think we can grow in grace apart from giving diligent attention to God’s Word?

But keep in mind that the Christian life is not just about taking the Bible and knowing it’s content. There is a reason Jesus is praying for our sanctification and not just telling us to read our Bibles. The Christian life is alive. It’s dynamic. We grow in holiness as God the Holy Spirit applies the Word to our hearts and minds. This is why you pray for spiritual growth. If God doesn’t take His Word and press it down into your heart, you’ll be puffed up with knowledge but not like Jesus in your character.

So again, I ask you, do you pray for your sanctification? Do you ask God everyday to cause to you to grow in holiness and to become more like Him. Your joy and contentment in life will increase as your holiness increases.

As we wrap this up this morning, there is one final thing to notice that we will develop fully in the coming weeks. If Jesus simply wants us to be free from evil and to be full of holiness, why doesn't He just take us to heaven? The answer is given in the 18th verse. *As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.* He has left you here for a mission. As I said, we will develop that more later, but for today, simply realize that for you to be able to fulfill your purpose for being here, you need to first be the kind of person God wants you to be. And that means putting off the old and putting on the new.

Will you begin to diligently pray for your victory over evil? Will you ask God to make you more holy? This is one of the greatest reasons for you to pray for yourself. And it is a prayer that will surely please God and one He will be delighted to hear and answer.