

64. Jesus' prayer for His disciples

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Some churches made the disciples of Jesus as somewhat go-betweens of God and the rest of human race. They even insist that you are supposed to pray through them so that God can grant your prayer requests. They've even elevated them into special group of pedigrees as if they were near perfect people while they were with Jesus.

But according to the four Gospels, what they said and did were anything but near perfect people. They constantly bickered and argued about who was the greatest after Jesus, even on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane.

They were quite a motley crew, were they not? While one of them was a former dishonest IRS agent appointed by Rome, the other was a Jewish nationalistic zealot. I am sure that they got along well. Then two brothers wanted to bring down a firestorm from heaven to burn the entire village because they didn't welcome Jesus – a new style of fiery evangelism I guess; a big former fisherman disciple had a couple of Conceal Carry Weapons with a bad impulsive temper; one of them constantly doubted just about everything. It is like they were the type of people whom you would see on the wall of a post office with the front and side views of their faces.

But guess what? The influence which Jesus made in their lives was a true transformation by God. Everyone of them with the exception of John was murdered for what they believed in Jesus. Even John himself was plunged into boiling oil in Rome, but suffered nothing from it. He later died in old age at Ephesus in about AD 100.

Jesus prayed for these disciples right after He prayed for Himself in this chapter. I believe what we are going to learn from this portion of Scriptures should be applied in our lives as well since we, too, are disciples of Jesus as His followers.

A. GOD'S CHARACTER IN THE DISCIPLES

John 17:6-8 "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. 7 Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. 8 For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me."

In the Bible, especially to the Jewish people, 'name' means much more than an individual identity of a person. It often refers to character or nature that reveals something special about the person who bears that name.

For example, according to Genesis 25, when Jacob was born, his hand took hold of his brother Esau's heel. So they called him "Jacob" which means "heel-catcher", "supplanter". Boy, did he ever live up to his name – scheming his brother, father, uncle, and others. When his older brother was born, he was like a hairy garment all over, so they called him "Esau" which means 'hairy'. I am sure that if evolutionists saw him, they would have rejoiced because they thought they found the missing link between man and ape.

Jesus made the Father known to His disciples with His teachings and the way He lived. He didn't simply teach about the character and nature of God the Father to them, but He manifested which means "displayed" the Father's character as His.

The disciples had been given to Jesus by the Father. The gift was irrevocable and the Father was able to guarantee it. Jesus had no doubt of the final outcome.

They recognized that Jesus' teachings came from God the Father and they accepted Him as a messenger of God, as their own confession declared in John 16:30.

John 16:30 Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God."

Through Jesus' earthly ministry, the disciples had received Him as the Messiah, and their conviction of His Messiahship had grown progressively during the period of association with Him. Now that the supreme test of their faith was impending, Jesus prayed that they might be preserved against the persecution that could separate them from Him and from one another.

B. FOR THEM, NOT FOR THE WORLD

John 17:9-10 I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. 10 And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them.

When Jesus says, "I do not pray for the world", it is not that He doesn't care about unbelievers. Because all the other of His comments make it clear that He loves the entire human race enough to die for them.

At this point, Jesus' intercession was confined to the 11 disciples who were present with Him. He was praying to the Father that these men were under His care. Jesus' statement "all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine" assumes His equality with the Father. Each has full title to the possessions of the other, because the Father and the Son share the same interests and responsibilities.

Jesus knew very well that the disciples in themselves were likely to fail. He had already predicted that they would desert Him in John 16. Nevertheless, He prayed for them with confidence that they would be kept by the Father's power and presented for a future ministry.

The same goes for us. We cannot do anything right by ourselves. But in Christ, we can do all things because He strengthens us through the Holy Spirit who lives in us. As long as we abide in Jesus and in His Word, we can overcome this troubled world.

C. JESUS' FIRST REQUEST – FATHER, KEEP THEM

John 17:11-12 Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. 12 While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

Our spiritual safety depends on the character of God – faithfulness, not our own intelligence or conduct. When He was on earth, Jesus kept His disciples and they could depend on Him. If our Savior Jesus, in a limited human body, could keep His own while He was on earth, should He not be able to keep them now that He is glorified in heaven? He and the Father, together with the Holy Spirit within us, are surely able to guard and secure God's people, don't you agree?

As I've said this many times before, we are invincible until the Lord calls us home. Some of you might say, "I just don't want Him to call me now." You know, I don't

know what you have going on in your life now, but whatever that is, I don't think that it can beat what the Father has for us in heaven, Amen?

Please note what Jesus says at the end of v11:

John 17:11b keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are

Nowhere in the Bible, does it encourage believers of Jesus Christ to be a loner, away from the fellowship of other believers. It talks about unity and fellowship with one another. Why did Jesus and His apostles teach us to have fellowship with one another? Because we need each other. In the hours that would follow, these men, including over-confident, concealed weapon carrying Peter, would discover how weak they were and how much they needed each other's encouragement.

While I am on this subject of fellowship, get to know the other members of our church fellowship by talking with them before and after church. Our members are flooding the foyer and sanctuary before the service and after the service. You can never, ever get to know the others during the 2 minute greeting time right after the announcements. Please make yourself available to chat with someone before and after the service for 10-15 minutes. Hang around, get to know each other. Invite them for a lunch. Or invite yourself to their lunch. It is biblical, because Jesus did that to Zacchaeus.

The believers of Jesus Christ are secure in Him for many reasons, but what about Judas? Please don't go there arguing about whether Judas lost his salvation or he was not saved from the beginning. He is an example of an unbeliever who pretended to have salvation but was finally exposed as a fraud. Jesus keeps all whom the Father gives to Him.

An interesting note I found here regarding Judas: By the infinite wisdom and foreknowledge of God, He knew the heart of Judas before the creation of the universe and prophesied in the Book of Psalm:

Psalm 41:9 Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me.

That is why Jesus said "that the Scripture might be fulfilled".

The Greek word for 'perdition' is "apoleia" which means "utter destruction." The Greek word of a person who destroys also appears in the Book of Revelation 9:11:

Revelation 9:11 And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon.

D. INSULATION THROUGH THE WORD, NOT ISOLATION

John 17:13-16 But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. 14 I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 15 I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

God's purpose is to multiply joy in our lives, not to subtract it. The world, the flesh, and the devil would tell us the opposite, but God wants joy fulfilled in our lives.

In this politically correct world, if you are an atheist, or an agnostic, or a Hindu believer, or an Islam believer, or a foul mouth raunchy person, they don't mind. But

if you are a born-again Christian, law-abiding and clean mouth person and say, "I love Jesus and follow Him," then you are their public enemy No. 1. Not because of you, but because of the One whom you love.

Let me ask you this: What is the biblical worldview on our culture? Are things getting better? Is humanity improving the world around it like many liberal educators and media insist? The Bible is really clear on this one: our culture is dark, and it is getting darker. That is what the Bible teaches. It is NOT going to get better; it is going to get worse. Despite the fact that humanity has increased in scientific, medical, historical, educational, psychological, and technological knowledge to an astounding degree, we have not in any way, shape, or form changed our own basic nature. And we have not improved society because of our utterly sinful depravity.

There are two types of movements that the Lord Jesus doesn't want us to get into:

1) Becoming one with the world

Under the banner of unbeliever-friendly, many churches embrace the so-called "Seeker Sensitive Church" movement. It is the movement that waters down the holiness and righteousness of God, but over-emphasizes the love of God. They don't talk about the depravity of sins, but only talk about the grace, mercy, love, and forgiveness of God.

You cannot have the love of God without the holiness of God. They go together. These seeker-sensitive churches are the lukewarm church in the Book of Revelation chapter 3:

Revelation 3:15-16 I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

It is not important what you'd like to hear from me, but it is important what my God wants me to speak. My boss is Jesus Christ and I report to Him for what I teach here. I will speak the truth of God as long as I have a breath because I don't want Him to puke me out of His mouth.

2) Isolating themselves from the world

Some Christians try to isolate themselves from the world around them. But that is virtually impossible. You may remove yourself and your children from the culture, or at least attempt to, but know this: your culture will find you.

Withdrawing to a Christian subculture is not what we are supposed to do. Jesus prayed this for us in v15. The objective of believers is not to isolate, but to insulate themselves with the Word of God; not to evade, but to invade. We are to impact our culture without being compromised by it.

If you put the Word of God in your heart, it guards you and protects you and enables you to enjoy the Father's love for us:

Psalm 119:11 Your Word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!

I like what the famous evangelist D.L. Moody said, "This Book [Bible] will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from this Book."

E. JESUS' FIRST REQUEST – FATHER, SANCTIFY THEM

John 17:17-19 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. 18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.

The Word of God not only brings us God's joy and love, but it also imparts God's power for holy living. We are in the world but not of the world, and we must not live like the carnal world. Sometimes we think it would be easier if we were "out of the world," but this is not true.

True sanctification which means being set apart for God, comes through the ministry of the Word of God. When you were saved, you were set apart for God. As you grow in your faith, you are more and more experiencing sanctification. You love sin less and you love God more. You want to serve Him and be a blessing to others. All of this comes through the Word.

Jesus set Himself apart for us, and now He has set us apart for Him. The Father sent Him into the world, and now He sends us into the world. We are people "under orders" and we'd better obey Him.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Our spiritual safety depends on the character of God – faithfulness, not our own intelligence or conduct.

2) We must not neglect the fellowship with other believers in Christ. Isolation from them makes us an easy target for satan and his cohorts.

3) The believers of Jesus Christ should not isolate, but insulate themselves with the Word of God; not to evade, but to invade the unbelieving world.