

*"I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those you have given me, for they are yours.*

*All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.*

*And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.*

*Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.*

*While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me.*

*I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.*

*But I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.*

*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. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.*

*They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth, your word is truth.*

*As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.*

*And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.*

*I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word..."*

**John 17:9-20**

### **"Sanctify Them in the Truth, Your Word is Truth."**

Pastor Stephen Ridge

Last week in John's gospel, we saw Jesus and his men pause on the near side of the Kidron Ravine, just opposite the Garden of Gethsemane. And there they prayed, I think, because Jesus knew that he would enter that garden a free man, but he would leave the garden in the custody of his enemies who would bring him to a cross. So Jesus stopped and prayed, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you." It was a strange moment for Jesus to be thinking about glory.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus had talked about his death and burial leading to glory. At the Last Supper, Jesus had reacted to defection of Judas by talking about glory, and now, as Gethsemane comes into sight, Jesus steels himself for his arrest by thinking and praying about glory, and the men around him will become the reason such a terrible night can lead to glory. So Jesus began to pray about his men, his disciples: "I have manifested your name to the people you gave me out of the world." In other words, the whole world had gone south on God, all humanity had long treated the Almighty more as a stranger than as a Father. But now Jesus tells the Father: "I have manifested your name...". In other words, Jesus had taught the men and women who traveled in his company God's name, what it meant to take God as a Father, to treat one another as family.

And Jesus describes the men and women around him to his Father as "the people whom you gave me out of the world." The point being that the gospel Jesus lived and taught, the words he said, the values he kept are so foreign and counter-cultural to people in this world that only the Father by the Spirit can move our hearts to look toward heaven for a way of life entirely different from what fits and works in the world. Years before, Jesus had said as much to Nicodemus, who was an orthodox rabbi, a religious man as far as the world could see, but Jesus warned him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born from above, he can't see the kingdom of heaven...unless one is born of water and Spirit, he can't enter the kingdom of God."

So Jesus prays to his Father about his disciples: "Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word." Jesus had said much the same to the disciples way back when in Galilee. He said, "All that the Father gives to me will come to me, and the one who comes to me, I will never, ever cast out." In other words, it takes a work of God, a move of the Spirit to turn our hearts toward Jesus, but once that work is done, we make a move toward God, we "come," Jesus said. Jesus tells the Father of the men around him, "...they have kept your word...I have given them the words you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me."

Now to modern ears, this sounds like so much doctrinal noise, but in fact Jesus is bursting with joy that a collection of tradesmen and riff raff have understood and believed a gospel that Israel's best and brightest wouldn't accept. "I'm praying for them." Jesus tells the Father, "I'm not praying for the world but for those whom you've given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them." Glorified? In another few hours, Jesus will be in custody, the cause will look lost.

But Jesus had a secret weapon in the men standing around him, looking so forlorn and careworn that the authorities didn't even bother to take them into custody. Who would have thought that the man they would execute wouldn't stay dead, and the men who had run away wouldn't stay scared? And that to Jesus was glory! It is to God's glory that people get forgiven because Jesus died, people go to heaven because Jesus rose, and people change the world because Jesus sent them his Spirit.

So, gazing across the brook toward the garden where he was headed, Jesus saw glory, a future that no one else could grasp that night. So he says to his Father, "...I'm no longer in the world but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name which you've given me that they may be one, even as we are one." Jesus' concern was not so much that they might have trouble, they would have trouble and Jesus had told them so only moments before.

His concern was that the troubles we face might distract us from Father who has given us his name, "...keep them in the name," Jesus prayed, "*that they may be one as we are one.*" Only by clinging to the Father, only by respecting his name and his values will we stay family in this world. To this point, Jesus had been the elder brother who kept his disciples together as "*one*," in the family, close to the Father. He prays: "*While I was with them, I kept them in your name... I guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.*"

So the notion that saving peoples' souls is a painless, harmless game is forever shown false by Judas, who shared Jesus' company, heard Jesus' teaching, but he never did allow the Spirit to bend his heart toward heaven. Judas followed the world's priorities, lived by the world's values. And when he found that he couldn't bend Jesus to his own end, when he saw that Jesus would be rejected by the world, Judas followed his heart back to its true home. He sought his own safety, his own future here in this world.

So now in the dark, across the ravine from the garden, Jesus prayed for the men who were still with him: "*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. I don't ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.*" This animosity between the gospel and world has confused many a believer in the centuries since that night. Gospel values and gospel priorities will always, ever offend the world.

The world will always be hard at work seeking to distract us from worshiping the Father and learning the gospel, from the love we're called to express to each other and to our neighbors. The world will always have something more important for us to do than to keep faith with God and with each other. But Jesus doesn't pray that we leave the world, and give up on people who don't believe our gospel and share our values. Jesus prays here, and Paul will teach in 1 Corinthians 5 that we engage with the world, that we live out gospel values and priorities among our unbelieving neighbors even though often they will only hate us for it.

And what Jesus saw as the compass that would keep us engaged with the world and headed for heaven was our Bibles, the Father's "*word*." So Jesus prayed about his men, "*They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth, your word is truth.*" This word "sanctify" essentially means to separate, not that believers form their own private clubs with their own lingo, and fashions, and styles like we did when we were kids in our junior high cafeterias. Really taking God's word to heart will make us different and keep us humble. We will defy worldly fashion without becoming snobs.

Jesus puts the Father's word in the center of this process because holiness, heavenliness is different from how most of us imagine religion should work. We tend to think in terms of self-reform, self-mastery, being right, getting it right when in fact God's word teaches an outlook where we become younger, smaller, like little children, meeker and gentler. I think one of the reasons it's hard to get modern Christians to handle God's word together in person is that our faith is so fragile we can't bear to be contradicted. So we dial up on the radio, we look up on the internet those teachers who will tell us what we already know, confirm what we already think.

But Jesus prayed differently to his Father, "*...for their sake I consecrate myself that they may be sanctified in truth.*" Jesus made himself subject to his Father's word, devoted to our well being, so that we too could learn a word from heaven, and devote ourselves to each other and to our neighbors around us who don't yet believe. It is the farthest thing from the mastery oriented, self exalting, it's-all-up-to-me religion that the world will tempt us to adopt. When we are small and weak, obedient to the word, devoted to God and each other as a way of life, then we become a real threat to the world and to the evil one.