

STUDY 8 - JOHN 17:1-19

At the end of John 16 Jesus has finished speaking to his disciples. Now, just before he heads into the olive grove to be arrested he speaks to his Father. This is a very unusual chapter in the gospels as we do not usually listen in to Jesus' prayers to his Father. It is clear though that we are not eavesdropping without permission – Jesus deliberately wants his disciples and us to listen in to what he is saying as an encouragement, and because what he prays for helps us to understand even more the reason why he is going.

As our Bible headings show, Jesus' prayer is divided into 3 sections. In verse 1-5 he prays for himself. Yet it is not a prayer of self pity (which would be understandable given what is about to happen), or even a desperate submission to the will of his Father (like his prayer in Gethsemane recorded in the other gospels). Jesus asks his Father to "glorify" him (verse 1) with the same glory he had with the Father before the world began (verse 5). At other points in this gospel Jesus has spoken about his glorification as occurring when he is on the cross, here he is looking beyond that to the completion of his work. Jesus is asking that his mission would succeed and that he would return to that position of glory he had with his Father prior to him coming to the earth. Jesus voluntarily gave up that position of glory to come to earth to do his Father's will.

In verses 2-4 Jesus speaks of what the Father gave him to do. This is why Jesus came down from heaven to earth. He was given authority over everyone, so that he might give eternal life to some. But notice what eternal life is – it is not simply quantity of life (life which goes on and on), but it is defined by its quality – a relationship with the Father and the Son. Death has entered the world not simply because life ends, but because we are out of a loving relationship with God.

However this is not a selfish prayer. Notice why Jesus wants to be glorified – so that the Father is glorified (verse 1). As the work of the cross is completed, the Son is glorified as he returns to the Father and is given his heavenly glory, and the Father is glorified in the perfect obedience and completed work of the Son.

We are tempted to think that the cross and resurrection is all about us. "Jesus died and rose again because he loves us". That is true. However, the reason why Jesus died, rose and ascended and is glorified is far deeper than that. He did it all to bring glory to his Father, and the Father did it to give glory to the Son. We are brought into that wonderful purpose because we are given eternal life – life which at its heart involves knowing God and bringing him glory.

In verses 6-19 Jesus moves on to pray for his disciples. Obviously these verses have reference particularly to the 11 he has in front of him. They are the one's Jesus is leaving, they are the one's Jesus has kept safe up to this point. But as Jesus says in verse 20, the application of what Jesus prays for them is for all believers in the future as well (and that includes us).

In verses 6-10 Jesus defines who he is praying for. As we have seen throughout these chapters the disciples are those whom the Father has given to the Son out of the world (there is an absolute contrast between the world and the disciples). It's helpful to notice who the disciples are from God's perspective and from their perspective. From God's perspective, they were (like the whole world) the Father's, and they were given to the Son (verse 7). The Son gave them the words the Father gave him (Verse 8). They now bring glory to the Son (Verse 10). From the disciples perspective they

obeyed the word of the Father through the Son (Verse 6), in particular they believed that Jesus came from the Father (Verse 8). Holding both of these perspectives helps us to make sure we recognise God's sovereignty over our salvation, but also our responsibility to believe.

Jesus prays for protection for his disciples. He is leaving them, yet they remain in the world which is opposed to him (remember 15:18-16:4). They are set apart for him (which is the meaning of the word "sanctify" in verse 17), and this has been because they have believed Jesus, and in particular they have believed his word (verse 14). The basis for the disciples being set apart for God is the cross - Jesus himself is going to be set apart for God (Verse 19).

While Jesus was with them the disciples were protected by his "name" (which in the Bible encapsulates all a person is and does). Even the loss of Judas was no accident (verse 12). Jesus prays that this protection will continue. This protection continues as they continue to be by set apart by God's word (Verse 17). The world rejects God's word, yet the disciples hear it and believe it and through it God protects them. He does not pray that they are taken out of the world – they still have work to do. He does not want monasteries or convents! He actively sends his disciples into the world (Verse 18).

A careful reading of this prayer shows that Jesus does not see the protection of the disciples as the end goal. He prays this so the disciples may know unity (verse 11) and joy (verse 13). We want both of these things in the Christian church, yet so often we seek them in the wrong places. Both of these things flow from God himself. The disciples know unity because they are united to God the trinity himself ("so they may be one as we are one"), this is not a unity they create through programmes or marches. This is a unity to be kept in the face of opposition from the world, a unity of love in the face of hate (see also 15:17, 18). The joy we know is Christ's joy (verse 13), not a sporadic feeling, a joy which flows from the cross and desires the glory of God.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

What does Jesus pray for? What is his desire? (Verse 1, 5)

What has the Father done for the Son? What has the Son done for the Father? (Verse 2, 4)

What does it mean to say that we have "eternal life" (verse 3)?

Why does Jesus pray this? (end of verse 1)

"Jesus came into the world to.....by....." How would you fill in the blanks from this passage? Why is it so important to speak about the cross like this?

Who does Jesus pray for? Who are they from God's perspective? From their perspective? Why do we need to remember both perspectives on who we are as disciples? (Verses 6-10)

What does Jesus pray for his disciples?

Why do they need this?

How are we tempted to seek protection from a hostile world? *We are tempted to leave the world by just spending time with disciples. See verse 15*

How will this come about? How does this connect with how they were first set apart for God? -
Through the word of God, how they first became disciples (compare verse 17 with verse 14 and verse 8)

Why does Jesus pray this? What is the basis for our being set apart for God (sanctified)?