

**The High Priestly Prayer of Christ**

**John 17:1-26**

**Part Six**

Many professing Christians are indifferent to the work of seeking and saving the lost even while the world around them is plummeting toward eternal destruction. This indifference is a very serious matter. It is a very serious matter because it is one of the last things that we should expect to see in a genuinely born again disciple of Christ. How can those who have been born again and who have become new creatures in Christ and who have in addition to this been set apart by God for the work of seeking and saving the lost be indifferent? It is unthinkable. Hopefully the truth of what I have just shared with you will come alive for us this morning and this leads us to the passage that we will be considering.

This morning we will revisit our continuing examination of the Gospel of John and more specifically our examination of what is commonly referred to as the high priestly prayer of Christ. This prayer was prayed on the last night of Christ's earthly life and is recorded for us in **John 17:1-26**.

Though this prayer is difficult to subdivide, because it is essentially a unity, I have attempted to provide a way for us to track its movement by asking the following question: Who did Christ pray for in His high priestly prayer? And that is the question that we have been seeking to answer. So what have we learned so far?

First of all, Christ in John 17:1-5 prayed for Himself. And what did He specifically pray? He asked His Father to glorify Him in "the hour" that had now come upon Him; or in other words, He asked His Father to glorify Him in all the events that that were about to take place that involved Him; such as His arrest, trial, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and coronation. This was His specific request. And what was the reason for this request? He asked His Father to glorify Him in the hour that had now come upon Him in order that He in turn might glorify His Father. This was made clear to us in **John 17:2**. And how would His glorification glorify His Father? Christ's glorification would glorify His Father because Christ's glorification would allow His Father's eternal redemptive plan to move forward making it possible for Christ to give the gift of eternal life to those His Father had chosen for salvation.

But even though Christ's prayer for His own personal glorification was primarily driven by His desire to see His Father glorified, He still very much longed for His own glorification, which was made very clear to us in **John 17:4-5**.

So after praying for Himself and His own personal glorification, whom did He pray for next? Christ in John 17:6-19 prayed for His eleven disciples. This is the section of Christ's high priestly prayer that we began to consider just prior to Christmas, which we will by the grace of God finish this morning.

So how did Christ begin this rather lengthy section of verses? He began by highlighting the reason why He was personally moved to pray for these specific men. And what was that reason?

Christ's prayer on behalf of His eleven disciples was motivated by an unconditional love rooted in the eternal decrees of His Father (John 17:11-16). We saw this in **John 17:11-16**.

And what was His initial request? Christ's initial request on behalf of His eleven disciples in John 17:11-16 was that His Father would keep them in His name. In other words, when Christ asked His Father to keep His disciples "in His name" or according to His person, He was asking His Father to keep His disciples loyal to Him as He Himself, during the course of His earthly life, had revealed Him.

So why was this prayer on behalf of His disciples necessary? Christ had, up to that point in time, protected His eleven disciples as a mother hen would protect her chicks and had in fact successfully kept them loyal to His Father but He was about to leave them. And because He was about to leave them He was now asking His Father to protect them in respect to their loyalty to Him even as He had protected them while He was with them.

So after the request on behalf of His eleven disciples in **John 17:11** that they be kept in His Father's name, which of course excluded Judas based on **John 17:12**, He now moves on to **John 17:13**. And how did He begin this verse? He began it this way, "**But now I come to Thee; and these things I speak in the world.**" So what is this all about?

When Jesus began **John 17:13** with the words, “**But now I come to Thee...**” we might think He is moving on to a different request other than the request that He had just made on behalf of His disciples that they be kept in His Father’s name. But this is not what He meant at all. When Jesus used the word “**but**” in **John 17:13** He did not change the request He simply changed His focus in respect to the request. Or in other words when Jesus said, “**but now I come to Thee; and these things I speak in the world,**” Jesus changed the focus from the perseverance of His disciples in respect to keeping His Father’s name to what they themselves would personally experience in the context of this life as a result of that perseverance.

And what did Christ tell them that they would experience as a consequence of this perseverance? First of all, they should expect to experience joy and not just any kind of joy but rather the joy of Christ or the joy of obedience. We saw this in **John 17:13**. And secondly they should also expect to experience suffering at the hands of the world and the ruler of this world, which of course is Satan. We saw this in **John 17:14-16**.

We are now ready to consider a second request that is somewhat similar but different enough to be considered separately.

So what is my hope for us as we consider this second request? My hope is that we might better appreciate how very important it is for us as professing disciples of Christ to purpose ourselves to be actively engaged in the work of seeking and saving the lost and that anything less than this needs to be corrected by the grace of God as soon as possible!

So where do we find this second request? We find this second request in **John 17:17-19**. So let me read these verses for you. And what do these verses say? “**Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. (18) As You sent Me into this world, I also have sent them into the world. (19) For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.**” So what is the second request?

Christ’s second request on behalf of His eleven disciples in John 17:17-19 was that His Father would sanctify them in the truth. So what does this mean? Let us begin by looking at the word “sanctify.”

The word “sanctify” (HAGIAZO) means “to set apart for God.” Therefore in light of this meaning we can now begin to understand what Christ was asking His Father to do. He was asking His Father to set His disciples apart for Himself and for His purposes.

But hadn't this already been done. Hadn't these disciples already been set apart for God and His purposes? Yes, in a very real sense they had been set apart. This is why Christ was able to say earlier in His high priestly prayer that His eleven disciples belonged to his Father in **John 17:6** and **9**. But even though this was true, that they in a very real sense had already been sanctified or set apart, they in a totally different sense had only begun to be sanctified, which is the reason why Christ prayed what He prayed in **John 17:17**.

It is not enough for a sculptor to simply put a block of stone on a pedestal. That same sculptor must sculpt the stone if the original purpose for setting the stone apart is going to be realized. And it is this ongoing sculpting dynamic that is clearly in view in Christ's request here in **John 17:17**.

When Christ asked His Father to sanctify or set apart His eleven disciples, He was asking His Father to continue the work of sanctification or the sculpting process that He had already begun.

So what tool would the Father use to accomplish this work? It would be the same tool that Christ used when He was with His disciples. The work of sanctification is accomplished through “the truth” (John 17:17). Let me read for you **John 17:17** one more time but this time I will read just a little bit further. And what does it say? **“Sanctify them in the truth.”**

And what specific truth did Christ have in mind when He spoke of the truth? Was it Dr. Phil's truth, Dr. Spock's truth, Dr. Laura's truth, your truth or my truth? No! The truth that would be used to sanctify His disciples was His Father's truth (John 17:17).

And certainly Christ's disciples were not strangers to His Father's truth. Jesus had already placed His disciples into that sphere. In other words, Christ had already ministered His Father's truth to them and had ministered His Father's truth to them so effectively that His disciples had already been lifted away from the world and upward to God, but that work needed to

continue. And this is why Christ prayed the prayer that He prayed here in **John 17:17**.

And was this prayer answered? Absolutely! His Father took over the work that Christ had begun. His Father, in response to His Son's request, sent the Spirit into this world to teach His disciples according to **John 14:26** and to lead them into all the truth according to **John 16:13**. And whose truth was it that the Spirit of God led them into? It was Christ's Father truth.

And where do we find His Father's truth today? We find it in our Bibles. The Bible is God's Word and it is the Bible that God's uses to sculpt us into the people God would have us to be and to do the things God would have us to do. Or in other words, we will never be the person that God wants us to be or be able to do what God wants us to do unless we learn to live in conformity with what the Bible teaches.

Do we need anything else besides the Bible to be what God wants us to be or to do what God wants us to do? No! We don't need anything else besides the Scriptures. The Scriptures are sufficient.

So now let us come back to the text. We now know that Christ wants His Father to continue to sculpt His eleven disciples, and we also know that He wants Him to do this by using His truth. But for what purpose does He want His Father to do this? It is all about the mission that Christ has given them to do.

Let us now read **John 17:18**. So what does it say? This is what it says, "**As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.**"

Christ wanted His Father to sanctify His disciples so that they, very much like Himself, might successfully complete the mission upon which they had been sent.

So what was Christ's mission? Christ had been sent into this world by His Father in order to seek and save the lost. This is clear from the words of Christ to Zaccheus in **Luke 19:10**.

So what was the mission of Christ's eleven disciples? The eleven disciples also were sent into this world by Christ to seek and save the lost. This is clear from the words of Christ to His disciples in **Matthew 28:16-20**.

Christ and His disciples had been sent into this world in essence with the same mission. They were both sent to seek and to save the lost (Matthew 28:16-29, Luke 19:10).

So what about us? Is this our work in this world as well? And what is the answer? Absolutely! This is our work. We, like Christ and His eleven disciples, have been sent into this world with the very same mission (2 Corinthians 5:16-20).

We, according to **2 Corinthians 5:16-20**, are to be Christ's ambassadors and ministers of reconciliation. In other words, we, as an extension of Christ, are to continue His work of seeking and saving the lost.

And is this important to Christ that we in fact do this work? Of course it is! This is why He prayed what He prayed in **John 17:18** when He asked His Father to sanctify His eleven disciples for this work.

Let me ask you a question. Is it possible for genuine born-again believers to travel through this life in a hermetically sealed container decorated with fish stickers passively disconnected from the lost all around them? I don't believe it is possible. And why is this? If we are in fact true disciples of Christ we will be chiseled.

This morning I have given you the truth, and this truth in the hands of God becomes the chisel by which He will sanctify us if we are in fact a true child of God.

We have a mission and that mission is to go into all the world and preach the gospel. This is the truth and this truth will impact Christ's true disciples and will set them apart; or in other words, this truth will sanctify them. They may not become Billy Grahams but they will care and they will begin to do all that they can within the limits of the gifts and abilities that God has blessed them with in order to accomplish the mission, which has been given to them by Christ.

How could this not happen? God has an awfully big arm and He has an awfully big chisel!

And the reality of what I have just shared with you I believe is highlighted in the very next verse. Let me now read for you **John 17:19**. **“For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they may be sanctified in truth.”**

What exactly does Christ mean by this when He says, **“For their sakes I sanctify Myself?”** Is He speaking of sanctifying Himself or setting Himself apart for death or is He speaking of something else? I believe it is speaking about something else.

When Christ in John 17:19 told His Father that for the sake of His disciples He was at the time sanctifying Himself, He was not speaking of His earthly mission but rather His heavenly mission (John 16:7). Let me read for you the words of Christ to His disciples earlier that night recoded for us in **John 16:7**. **“But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you but if I go I will send Him to you.”** Going back to His Father and sending the Holy Spirit back to them to be their helper was the mission that Christ was now embarking Himself upon as He faced His cross, and it was this work, His heavenly work, that He had in mind when He told his Father **“For their sakes I sanctify Myself.”** And this fits perfectly with what Christ says next, **“that they may be sanctified in truth** [For what? For the work of missions].

Does God have a big arm and a big chisel? Absolutely! And His arm and His chisel will accomplish the work He has purposed it to accomplish until we are chiseled into the person He wants us to be, and doing the work that He wants us to do, and what is very high on the list of what He wants us to do. He wants us to purpose ourselves to seek and save the lost and He will continue to chisel us until that is accomplished.

May we by the grace of God become what He wants us to become and to do what He wants us to do as He continues to sanctify us through His truth.