Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

I am a regular borrower of library books. And occasionally I have found something inside a library book – a receipt, or a bookmark, or maybe even a note. Have you ever found something like that in someone else’s book? Well, I remember reading once about a woman who was sorting out the earthly belongings of her recently deceased mother and she came to her Mum’s old Bible. And opening it up she found a well used piece of paper inside that said at the top, “A Prayer for My Children” and it had a hand-written prayer underneath it. And because the prayer had a few changes here and there and the addition of spouse names, etc, it was plain that this prayer had been prayed many times, for years or decades even. And as you can imagine, it was a very emotional moment for this woman who was reading the prayer that her Mum had prayed for her.

Well, we will talk about this more within the sermon but John 17 is a prayer that the Lord Jesus prayed about us. And because of *who* He is, knowing *why* He prayed for us and *what* He prayed for is very important. And if discovering a parent’s prayer would fill our hearts with love and thankfulness, then surely this prayer should do that even more!

We have noted previously that in church language, the things we ask for in prayer are called ‘**petitions**.’ And I explained that this prayer has two main petitions – in vv1-5 Jesus asks for something for Himself, and then in vv6-26 He asks for things for believers. Well, I want to refine that a bit and say that on further reflection the petition for believers really begins at v9, where Jesus says, “*I am praying for them*.” Vv6-8 are where He explains the work He was sent to do that He mentions in v4.

But there are still the two main petitions – what Jesus asked for concerning Himself, and what He asked for concerning believers.

And we looked at what He asked for concerning *Himself* last time under the theme of **the Glory of Christ**.

But now we come to the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer, which is what Jesus asks for concerning believers. And our three points today are **Who** Jesus prayed for, **Why** He prayed for them, and finally, **what** He prayed for.

1. So we begin with **Who** Jesus prayed for.And we consider this point because even though you have already heard me say that He prays here for all believers, including you and me, it is important that we see this from the text.
   1. In v2, Jesus says that He was given authority over all flesh, “*to give eternal life to all whom [the Father] [had] given Him*.” And He uses a phrase like this again in v6, v8, and v24. And we have talked about this in our earlier sermons on this chapter. Jesus is identifying **the elect** or those chosen by God before the creation of the world to be given to Jesus to mark out who He is praying for. And this is plainest in v9 where He says, “*I pray for them. I am not praying for the world but for those you have given me*.”
   2. But as you read through the prayer it is clear that Jesus is praying specifically for the disciples in places:
      1. In v6, He says that *He manifested the Father’s name to them* and *they received the words and believed*, as we see in v8.
      2. And in v12, He talks about *while He was with them* and how *He guarded them* and *lost none of them* “*except the son of destruction*,” which is a reference to Judas Iscariot.
      3. And then in v18 He speaks about how He has “*sent them into the world*.”
      4. So parts of His prayer are specifically for the 11 remaining disciples.
   3. But if you look at **v20**, Jesus also mentions all future believers; He says, “*I do not ask for these only* (meaning the disciples)*, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.”* So the disciples were to preach all that they had seen and heard of Jesus, and to write it down, which is the New Testament. And whoever would believe in Jesus in response to the word of the disciples is also who Jesus is praying for.
   4. And we will come back to this at the end of the sermon but WHO of this second petition is the disciples and all believers.
2. Now, we shall look at what it is that Jesus asks for concerning all believers in our third point, but before we get there, it will help us to take note of what Jesus says about the situation of believers. For this is also very instructive. So our second point is **Why** Jesus prayed for the disciples and all believers.

* 1. Look first of all at **v11**: Jesus says, “*And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world*.” So just our being in the world is part of why Jesus prayed for us. Why is this?
     1. Well, the reality is that there was only ever a very short time of human history that this world was a wonderful place for God’s people. And the period we are talking about is the period of time between the creation of man and the Fall. Adam was created on day 6 and we are told that God look at all He had made and behold it was? “*Very good*.” But after the Fall, the whole universe was cursed. After the Fall, God’s people would always have sin within them and they would be in a world that was utterly infected with sin. God explained that there would be a constant war between the line of the devil and the line of faith. This has been described as the **Antithesis** – on the one side are those who recognize that the earth is the Lord’s and they seek to live for Him and on the other side are those who reject God and wittingly or unwittingly follow the evil one. So there is no neutrality; every human being is either for Christ or against Christ. So the world is anti-christ.
     2. This is why **1 John 2:15-17** says, “*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world- the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions- is not from the Father but is from the world*. *And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever*.”
     3. So just being in the world is already a challenge for believers – we are surrounded by ideas and behaviour that does not seek to honour the Lord, and even as believers we are still infected with remaining sin. And this will not end until we are with the Lord in glory.
     4. So the Lord Jesus prayed for us because we are in the world. Is this something you are conscious of? Is this something you pray about? Lord, open my eyes to the reality of sin around me and within me.
  2. But this is not merely a passive thing; just some reality that we need to be aware of.
     1. Look next at **v14**: There Jesus says, “*I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of this world, just as I not of the world*.”
        1. We are in a section of the prayer where the disciples are especially in view. And we know that the Jewish leaders persecuted the disciples after Jesus ascended. But it is not just the disciples who are in view here. When we look at 15:18ff, the main point of the sermon from that passage was that whoever follows Christ will be persecuted. So you and I will be hated by the world. The world does not like to hear that unless they repent and believe in Jesus they will spend eternity in hell. They do not like to hear Thus says the Lord – this behaviour or that behaviour is sin. So the Lord Jesus prayed for us because the world hates us.
     2. But look also at **v15**: Jesus says, “*I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one*.” Congregation, there really is a devil and he really assaults and attacks believers.
        1. I am sure you boys and girls will know that in **Ephesians 6:11** we are told to put on the? “*whole armour of God*.” But does anyone know what reason is given for our needing to put on the armour? “*So that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil*.” The picture of the believer that the Bible gives us not of a person in a lounger by the pool sipping a pinacolada; it is of an alert soldier!
        2. Is that a good description of you? Are you an alert, watchful, battle ready believer? Are you always at work *fastening* the belt of truth and *polishing* the breastplate of righteousness, and *sharpening* the sword of the Spirit, etc?
     3. Now, there are many schemes of the devil; there are all sorts of ways that he works to tempt us to sin, but there is one area that receives special attention in this prayer, and that area is the area of **division**. In v11, Jesus’ prayer for the disciples was “*that they may be one, even as we are one*.” In v21, His prayer for all believers was that “*they may all be one*,” and in v23 “*that they may become perfectly one*.”
        1. In **Acts 2-5** we are given a description of the early NT church. We read things like “*all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved*.” Wow! What a time! But when we get to Acts 6 we see the first problem in the church. Do you remember what it was? Complaints from Hellenists against Hebrews about food distribution. In short? Division. The schemer was at work to divide the Lord’s people.
        2. And if you read through all of the **Epistles**, front and centre in the issues that the Apostles wrote about was division. Romans – Jew/Gentile, weaker brother/stronger brother, Corinthians – “I follow Paul,” “I follow Apollos,” we *can* eat meat offered to idols, no we *cannot*, tongues *are* better than healing, no they *aren’t*, Christ *has* risen, no He *hasn’t*, and on it goes, Galatians – circumcision is necessary for salvation, no it isn’t… I trust you get the picture. Even Philippians, which doesn’t seem to address any particular theological issues in Philippi, has two believing women, Euodia and Syntyche, at each other’s throats. And a prominent command of the Apostle in that letter is that believers have the same love and be in full accord and of one mind. Division is the devil’s number one scheme to afflict the church.
        3. And if we come to today, yes, God is at work in His church despite the fact that there are so many **denominations**. But I am sure you will agree that the fact that there are so many denominations in what we all confess to be the one church of Christ is not a good witness.
        4. And if you think back over the recent history of **ARC**, I think I am correct in saying that what will grieve those of us who have been here for some time the most is division – various issues that have divided members and families, with some members even choosing to leave. And it’s painful; it hurts. It is not how it should be. The evil one has been at work here and he has been successful.
        5. Brothers and sisters, do you value unity? Do you pray for unity? Do you work for unity? Are you a submitter, like Jesus was? Can you put ‘your way’ behind the Lord’s way? Are you willing even to be personally wronged, to suffer even when you did what was right, because that’s what Jesus did, and that is what He commands us to do (1 Peter 2)?
  3. So Jesus prayed for us because *we are in the world*, and because *the world hates us*, and because *the evil one attacks us*, often through division.

1. And that brings us, thirdly and finally, to **What** Jesus prayed for. And there are three things that Jesus specifically asks for on behalf of the disciples and all believers:
   1. The first we see in vv11-15, which is where Jesus prays, “*Father,* ***keep them*** *in your name*,” and then in v15, “*Keep them from the evil one*.” So He asks the Father to keep believers.
      1. In Greek, the word translated as keep literally means to attend to carefully, to take care of, to guard, to preserve, to not leave alone, to hold firmly.
      2. Listen to the words of **Psalm 121**: “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all evil; He will keep your life. The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.”
      3. Earlier in the Gospel, Jesus said, “*All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out* (6:37).” And He also said, “*And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given me, but raise it up on the last day* (6:39).” And in Romans 8:39, we read, Nothing “*will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*.”
      4. Believer, you are in the world and the world hates you and the devil is constantly at work to assault you, but because of who God is He *can* keep you and because of Christ’s work on your behalf and this prayer, He *will* keep you!
   2. But the second thing that the Lord Jesus asks for we see in v17 where He says, Father, “***sanctify them*** *in the truth*.”
      1. In Greek the word translated as ‘sanctify’ means to make holy, to separate from what is common and profane, to purify, and to cleanse.
         1. In **Exodus 40**, Moses was commanded to consecrate or sanctify all of the objects that would be sued in the temple. So spoons and forks and candles and tables and basins that looked just like other spoons and forks and candles and tables and basins were *set apart* for special use.
         2. So even though you and I look just like non-believers, we have been set apart by God as His special people. And this is done, definitively and once for all, in our justification. When we are united with Christ by faith, we become God’s set apart, special people. That becomes our new *position*. And as you work through the Epistles that is all how they typically begin – believer, this is your position, this is who you are in Christ, you are a saint, you are a child of God, you are a justified one. But the problem is, and this is what Jesus is Jesus was praying about, we often do not live like what we are. In fact, we often live like we are not justified, saints, children of God. When we lie or steal or lust, we are living as though we belong to the devil. So the Lord Jesus prayed that the Father would sanctify us, make us more and more holy and pure and godly.
      2. But He also tells us **how we will be santified** – it is “*in the truth*,” and truth is the word of the Lord. Back in ch. 16, Jesus promised that He would send believers the Spirit of truth who would guide us into all truth. You see, the world has its truth, by which is meant its values and its standards. But we see how they change on an almost daily basis. But in the Bible we have God’s unchanging truth. So this petition of the Lord Jesus is asking the Father to make us more and more holy through the Word and Spirit.
         1. And brothers and sisters, this is **not some magical process** that happens when you have a Bible somewhere in your house. Occasionally you hear about people who prepare for exams by putting their textbook under their pillow at night, believing that the information in the textbook will magically seep up into their brains. Sorry young people, that does not work ☹ And similarly, you will only be sanctified by the Spirit and the word as you regularly read your Bible in here and at home and in Bible studies, and pray for wisdom and understanding and sanctification.
   3. But the third thing that Jesus asks for on behalf of believers is in v24: “*Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory*.”
      1. And we have talked about this previously. It is a mystery beyond our understanding! The Lord Jesus, who is unchangeable God, feels incomplete without all those whom the Father has given to Him. He yearns for the day when we will be with Him. Isn’t that staggering?
      2. But He knows that one day this part of His prayer will also be answered; one day, as 1 John 3:2 explains, we will be with Him and “*we shall see Him as He is*.”

So the WHAT of this prayer is that the Father would *keep* us, *sanctify* us, and *bring* us to heaven.

Well, that brings us to the end of our tour of Ch. 17. Let’s close with one last thought: Earlier on we read from **Exodus 28** about the breastplate worn by the High Priest. It had twelve precious stones with each one bearing the name of one of Israel’s twelve tribes on it. We read, “*So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastplate of judgment on his heart, when he goes into the Holy Place, to bring them to regular remembrance before the LORD*.” Well, this prayer of the Lord Jesus is called the High Priestly prayer. And the preacher **Charles Spurgeon** said of it, “Our Lord Jesus pleads for His own people. When He puts on His priestly breastplate, it is for the tribes whose names are there. When He presents the atoning sacrifice, it is for Israel whom God has chosen.”

So I must end by asking you today, Is your name on the figurative breastplate that Jesus was wearing as He prayed this prayer? Are you one of those who Jesus prayed for? And you can know if this is the case. If you look at v8 of the prayer, Jesus said this about the disciples. “*I gave them the words that you gave to 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*.” And the three key words are **receive**, **know**, and **believe**. Have you *received* and do you *know* and *believe* in your heart that Jesus is the Son of God and He died on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins? Have you accepted and agreed with and trusted in Christ as your Saviour and Lord? Are you striving each day to repent of your sins and honour Christ with your obedience?

* If you can say, Yes, then you can know for sure that as Jesus prayed this prayer, He was praying for you.
* But if you are not sure because though you believe in Jesus you are troubled by your sin and guilt, then let me encourage you by reminding you that being troubled by sin and guilt is a sign of faith. It would be a bad sign if your sin and guilt did not trouble you. Look to your High Priest and His sacrifice. Confess your sins and know that He will forgive you. And know also that when Jesus prayed this prayer, He was praying for you.

Praise God for this remarkable prayer! And knowing that one day you will be where the Lord Jesus is, work hard to become more and more like Him now! Amen.