

Listening to Jesus Pray for Us #2

John 17

Call: Ps 121 (ESV)

Scripture: John 17 (ESV)

I. Introduction

Good morning! Well, it's been another week of interruptions hasn't it? It seems these weeks are becoming more common. I don't know about you, but as I sat in silence with no noise but the humming of generators and sat in darkness with no lights but candles, it made me think of being still and knowing that he is God. And, in the midst of that, I was brought once again to the place of being thankful for a God who is for me and who prays for me, who is praying for me right now. That is of course what John 17 is – God's prayer for you and for me.

Review

As I suggested last week, the way to get into this thick prayer is to ask, "What does Jesus desire?" What is Jesus asking his Father to do? For him? For us? Last week, we focused in on one thing – glory. Jesus wants you and I to know – so that the whole world will know – the glory of God, which is to say – the nature and essence of the Father, what the Father is really like. This glory will ultimately be revealed the next day at the cross, for it is there where we see the full extent of the self-emptying love of God. We see fully the loving embrace of the Father. And what Jesus desires his Father to do is to teach all people about that great love he has for everyone. This is the deepest desire of his heart. That was our focus last week.

I. Structure

This week, before we get into the prayer, I want to say a few things about structure. Most people suggest three sections to this prayer. I think most English translations divide the prayer into three sections, a section where Jesus prays for himself, a section where Jesus prays for his first disciples and a section where Jesus prays for all believers. That's a convenient structure, but I've never thought it was as neat as that. Afterall, what he prays for his first disciples applies to us, and what he prays for us applies to them, right? Plus the themes of the prayer are quite intertwined and continue to reoccur throughout the prayer.

So, I wonder if Jesus has given us an audio cue in his prayer. What if we pay attention to his use of the name "Father." This is actually how I had Sneha and Naomi read it today. They switched every time Father was said. Six times Jesus cries out, "Father."

- Verse 1 – *"Father, the hour has come ..."*
- Verse 5 – *"Father, glorify Me..."*
- Verse 11 – *"Holy Father, keep them in Your name ..."*
- Verse 21 – *"Father, even as You are in Me and I am in You..."*
- Verse 24 – *"Father, I desire ..."*
- Verse 25 – *"O Righteous Father ..."*

“Father, Father, Holy Father; Father, Father, Righteous Father.” It’s actually a good way to remember the prayer, isn’t it? And, could it be that each time Jesus says, “Father,” he is moving into a relatively new concern or new desire? *“Father, Father, Holy Father; Father, Father, Righteous Father.”*

II. The Given Ones

So, let’s dig in now by asking the question again, “What does Jesus desire?” And, let’s begin with one of the key words of the prayer: give or given. And, particularly, this word as it is used to describe those who have been given to Jesus. Seven times Jesus speaks of those whom the Father has “given” to him:

- Verse 2 – *“to all whom you have given”*
- Verse 6 – *“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me...”*
- Verse 6 again – *“Yours they were, and you gave them to me.”*
- Verse 9 – *“I am praying for them... whom you have given me”*
- Verse 11 – *“Holy Father, keep them ... which you have given me”*
- Verse 12 – *“While I was with them, I kept them ... which you have given me.”*
- Verse 24 – *“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me...”*

Seven times “given or gave.” Do you hear what Jesus is saying about you and me? Those who believe in him are given ones, are gifts. Gifts of the Father to his Son! I am a gift, you are a gift, all followers of Jesus are gifts, gifts from the Father to his Son! Talk about identity; talk about self-esteem! I’m looking at a room full of gifts! Each one of you is a gift! You are a gift from the Father to his Son!

Oh Father – help us see each other as gifts from you!

Walter Luthi, a Swiss pastor of the mid-20th century, says this about the word “given” in John 17:

“So that is how it came about that two men, whom Jesus met at their work by the Sea of Galilee, left their nets and all they had, and followed Him; and two more, who were with their father mending nets, did the same thing when He called them! So that is what happened when He met Matthew, sitting at the receipt custom, and invited him, ‘Follow Me,’ so that he left his job and became a disciple. So it was the Father who gave these men to the Son! In every new disciple, He [Jesus] saw a new gift, until their number was complete... While Jesus was calling His disciples on earth, they were chosen for him in heaven, each one allotted to him by [the Father]... This is truly an astonishing assertion.” (Luthi, 242).

So, that is what is happening even now. The Father is giving disciples to the Son. Of course, this has important implications for our evangelism ministries, doesn’t it? Each new believer is not won by us? Each new believer is not “won” at all. Each new believer is “given” by the Father, to Jesus. They are the Father’s, and he gives them to Jesus.

In this prayer, Jesus honors all believers as gifts from his Father. He honors you and me as given ones. And, he wants you to know that truth, that you are a gift.

What else does he desire for you and me?

III. Eternal Life

A. Introduction

Well, as we saw last Sunday, he wants the Father to glorify him so that he will then glorify the Father, so that we can then have eternal life, verses 2 and 3.

2 ...since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him [to all his gifts]. 3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

There is only one “true God,” and Jesus glorifies him. Jesus makes known God so that we, in turn, might know God. And Jesus desires that through our knowing of God, by means of all he says and does, we may then have eternal life. This language here is personal language, it’s relational language, to *know* the living God in a relationship through Jesus whom he has sent.

This is eternal life. You probably know that although eternal life is a life that does not end, long life is not the point of eternal life. Eternal life is the life that the eternal God has. Eternal life is the life the eternal God is, and Jesus desires to give “his given ones” this kind of life, right now, in the present. Among other things, it’s a life characterized by generosity and abundance and a fullness of light and purity and extravagant love and a peace that passes all understanding and a fullness of joy. We’ll come back to joy at the end. This is eternal life, the life that God has, the life that God is, and that’s what Jesus desires for you right now!

The question is – does he, Jesus, really have the authority and the power to grant this eternal life? Answer: Yes!

B. Authority

At the beginning of verse 2, Jesus says that God has given him “authority” over all flesh. Jesus will repeat this claim after his resurrection, as part of what has been known as the Great Commission: “*All authority has been given to him,*” Matthew 28:18. In other words, he doesn’t take it. It is given to him on the basis of his obedience to the Father in life, death, resurrection and ascension. This is what the great Philippians hymn is saying:

“[Jesus] humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:8-11).

Because Jesus was obedient to the call of self-emptying love throughout, God gives him the authority and power to give the life of the eternally living God to all believers. That's what he desires for us!

What else does he desire for his given ones?

IV. The Kept Ones

A. Introduction

He desires that his given ones are "kept" ones. Verse 11 – *"Holy Father, keep them..."* "Keep" is such a wonderful word in Scripture. Not just "protect" the given ones. But "keep" them.

Of course, it echoes the great Benediction from Numbers 6: *"May God bless you and keep you ..."* (Num 6:24). But, it also echoes many other great texts:

- Psalm 121 – *"He who keeps you will not slumber... The LORD is your keeper... The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.*
- Jude 1 – *"To those who are called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ."*
- Jude 24 - *"Now to Him Who is able to keep you from stumbling."*

Father ... Holy Father ... keep my disciples. Keep those whom you have given me. Watch over them Father. Pay careful attention to them Father. Hold them safe and secure in your loving hands Father.

B. Judas

Now, within this theme of keeping, Jesus does address Judas, in verse 12: *"I have guarded them [while I was with them], and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled."* What Scripture is Jesus referring to here? Probably Psalm 41:9: *"Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me."* In this Psalm, David is lamenting the fact that people are gossiping about him and plotting against him. Jesus had already quoted this Psalm back in chapter 13 in reference to Judas, so it would make sense for him to refer again to it here. The point is that Jesus never loses any whom the Father has given him, except the one who has chosen to be lost, the one who did not want to be the Father's gift.

C. Kept in Three Ways

Now within this prayer, Jesus' desire to "keep" the disciples has three aspects to it.

1. **Keep Them in the World:** First of all, Jesus prays to keep the disciples in the world, verse 15. Father, *"I do not ask that you take them out of the world..."* In fact, later in verse 18, he will pray, *"As you sent me into the world so I have sent them."* Jesus prays that his given ones not be taken out of the world, but be sent into the world just as he was.

So “kept” cannot mean to be “kept” from struggles or pain or suffering or danger. Jesus sends us into the world just as he was sent, right into the midst of the struggles, pain, suffering and danger.

So, why not take us out of the world? Sometimes I wish he wouldn’t have prayed this, and would have taken us out of the world. So, why? Well, Jesus’ disciples must be kept in the world for the sake of the world, even with all its struggles, pain, suffering and danger, even with all its temptations. Why? Because we, the given ones, “*are the salt of the earth... and the light of the world,*” as he tells us in his Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:13, 14). Without salt, the earth loses flavor and putrefies. Without light the world goes dark. So, for the sake of the world, Jesus’ disciples, the given ones, must be kept in the world.

But, while we are in the world, Jesus prays for a second aspect of being kept, the end of verse 11.

2. **Keep Them In The Father’s Name:** “*Holy Father, keep them in your name.*” In verse 12, Jesus says that while he was with them, he kept them in the Father’s name. And now that he is leaving the world, he desires that the Father keep them in his name.

As you may know, name is shorthand for character and reputation. Father, keep them in your character and reputation. The name is “*Holy Father.*”

- Holy – pure, radiant, clean, beautiful beyond comprehension, wholly other.
- Father – Pater, Abba, Faithful Papa.

Father, keep the given ones as their “Holy Father,” as their “pure, beautiful beyond comprehension, faithful Abba.”

I think Jesus is praying something like this:

Father, guard them from developing distorted images of You. Father, do not let them even begin to think that you are not pure, not good, not loving, not for them. Father, your given ones carry so much pain around the word “Father.” Heal that pain Father. Restore to them the joy of your goodness, Father. Father, they also live in a pluralistic world. Do not let them drift into false ideas about You. Keep them in your true and holy name.

As we said last week, Jesus desires for us, the given ones, to know his Father for who he truly is and what he is truly like. So, his desire here is – Holy Father, keep them with a correct view of your character and reputation – keep them as you are truly like.

But, there’s also a third aspect to this keeping, verse 15.

3. **Keep From The Evil One:** “*I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.*” Do you hear the connections to the Lord’s Prayer, the

prayer Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew? I actually think John 17 is the Lord's Prayer, and Matthew 6 is the Disciple's Prayer, but changing 2000 years of tradition is probably not worth it.

So, the prayer Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6 begins with honoring the name,

*"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be Your name,*

and ends with seeking "keeping" from the evil one.

deliver us from the evil one" (Matt 6:9, 13).

That's what Jesus taught us to pray.

And, here, for the sake of the world, the disciples must be kept in the world, must be kept in his name, and must be kept from the evil one. The evil one wants to suck disciples back into "world," where they will begin resisting and rejecting God. The evil one wants to divert disciples' attention. The evil one wants to distract disciple's devotion. Ultimately, the evil one wants to destroy disciple's confidence in the Father, that he is a good, good Father.

We know this from the two great temptation stories in the Bible, Genesis 3 and Jesus' temptation narrative. In these two narratives, we discover that the evil one's major goal is to get us to doubt the goodness of the Father.

- In Genesis 3, the evil one says to Eve, *"Did God actually say ...?"* which raises suspicion in her mind that the creator is withholding something she needs.
- In Jesus' temptation narrative, after 40 days of fasting, the evil one says to Jesus, *"If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread"* (Matt 4:3). Stones Jesus. That's all that's out here. Stones. Seems to me, Jesus, you've been abandoned. The Father doesn't love you, Jesus. He's left you out here to die.

The evil one's great desire is to get us to be suspicious of the Father. And, Jesus' prayer here is, "Father don't let that happen! *'Keep them from the evil one.'*" Don't let the evil one undermine their faith. Don't let him trick disciples into putting confidence in other things.

So, keep them Father. Keep them in the world for the sake of the world, but as you do, keep them in your name and keep them from the evil one.

V. The Joyful Ones

A. Introduction

And, what else does Jesus desire for his disciples as they are kept in the world? Joy! Verse 13: *"That they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves."* Jesus wants his joy made full in us!

In John 15, Jesus said a similar thing, *“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full”* (15:11). And, now, a few hours later, he asks the Father to make it happen. As he sends us into the world, he prays for a fullness of joy. Father, help them experience my joy. Thank you for this prayer Jesus! As someone has said, “We cannot make it without joy. Joy is like oxygen, without it, life gets sucked right out of us. This is why he prays to be kept from the evil one, because the evil one is the joy robber. He’s always trying to suck the joy out of us” (Johnson).

Boy, that power outage is really bad. It sure is uncomfortable isn’t it? That bank implosion is sure unsettling isn’t it? Isn’t it obvious to you that your heavenly Father has deserted you. He doesn’t care about you. That’s the “joy robber” speaking.

But, our Lord wants us to have joy, and not only joy, but his joy. Father, I want them to “have my joy,” he says, and the full measure of his joy.

B. Joy Definition

Let’s go back and review what joy is again. Joy is more than happiness. Happiness is too tied to “happenings,” and therefore comes and goes as happenings come and go. Joy is more than pleasure. Pleasure is too tied to glandular functions, and therefore comes and goes as glands fluctuate. Joy goes much deeper and is much more stable than happiness or pleasure.

Someone has said that joy is the sentiment that says, “I’m home and I can rest, because this is what I was made for” (Johnson).

I’m convinced that joy is what attracted people to Jesus while He was on earth. Jesus was not uptight. He was not self-pre-occupied. He was not worrying about how he was coming across, or about what was getting written on social media. He was free to simply be. He was winsome, and full of joy. And, people flocked to him.

And what about today? In our culture where, on the one hand people are turned off to Christianity, and on the other hand people have no real exposure to authentic Christianity, what will draw them? Our joy. The joy of Jesus made full in us. Father, I want my disciples to have my joy in them.

As I shared last fall, Karl Barth’s definition of joy resonates with me. Joy, said Barth, is “a defiant nevertheless” (Barth, 120). In the face of all the messiness of life in this world, joy is “a defiant nevertheless.”

- “Nevertheless” there is a God.
- “Nevertheless” this God is on the throne.
- “Nevertheless” this God is good ... all the time.
- “Nevertheless” this God is faithful ... all the time.
- “Nevertheless” this God is for us!
- “Nevertheless” this God became one of us.

- “Nevertheless” Jesus gave his life for us.
- “Nevertheless” Jesus conquered the grave and is alive today.
- “Nevertheless” Jesus is Lord!
- “Nevertheless” we are being conformed into His likeness.
- “Nevertheless” no one can snatch us out of Jesus’ hands. No one can snatch us out of his Father’s hands.

Jesus wants his “defiant nevertheless” to be made full in us.

I have to admit that joy is not one of my strong areas. Joy is hard to come by on for me on most days. I’ve been thinking about this over the last few months because one of my dear friends who died last fall was one of the most joyful people I have ever met. For her memorial, I simply talked about the genuine joy of Jesus which she had in abundance. I want that joy, that the joy of the Lord would be my strength. But it’s hard in an overwhelming and unsettling world. So, I know I need someone who will fight for me to know joy. Well, I have someone! And so do you! Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is fighting for you and for me right now, that we would be filled up with the full measure of his joy.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, what does Jesus desire? What does Jesus want for us? Just listen to all that he is praying for you right now from his throne:

- From last week, he wants us to know the glory of his Father, who his Father is and what his Father is really like.
- From this week, he wants us to really know that we are gifts. You, me, all of us, are gifts from the Father to the Son.
- He wants us to have eternal life, to live in the life of the eternal God right now and forever.
- He wants the Father to keep us
 - To keep us in the world, so we can be salt and light in the world.
 - To keep us in the Father’s name, and
 - To keep us from the evil one.
- And He wants us to experience the fullness of his joy.

This is what Jesus desires for you and for me right now. And, there’s one more thing I know he wants for us.

VII. Communion

A. Introduction

He, the risen Jesus, wants us to consistently share a meal with him. Hebrews tells us that Jesus, *“for the joy set before him endured the cross” (Heb 12:2)*. Jesus was not only “the man of prayer,” as we said last week, he was also “the man of joy.”

Communion can be a serious and sobering meal, and at times, should be. But, it is also called “the sacrament of joy,” for this is how the early church celebrated it as we see in Acts 2. (Schmemmann, 15). Why? Because, in this meal, we celebrate the life of Jesus for us, but also the life he has the authority to give us, the “eternal life” he gives us now and forevermore.

B. Fence and Reflection

All those who believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior are invited to participate in communion at PBCC. Let’s take a moment in silence to thank the Lord and to prepare our hearts, as the team plays.

C. Prayer

Let’s pray together.

Father, we praise and thank you for loving us and giving all of yourself to us in your Son Jesus Christ. We do not presume to come to your table, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your all-embracing love and mercy. We are not worthy even to gather the crumbs under your table, but it is your character to always show mercy.

Grant us, therefore, God of mercy, so to eat at this, Your table, that we may receive in spirit and in truth the body of Your dear Son, Jesus Christ, and the merits of His precious blood, so that we may live and grow in His likeness and, being forgiven, washed and cleansed through His most precious blood, we may evermore live in You and You in us. Amen.

D. Words of Institution

The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Amen.

Benediction (Num 6:24-26)

The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you
a peace that passes all understanding and
a full measure of his joy.
Amen.

Resources

Barth, Karl, *Epistle to the Philippians*

Burge, Gary, *John (NIV Application Commentary)*

Carson, Don, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus*

Johnson, Darrell, *John 17 (Regent College Course, #3810)*

Klink, Edward, *John (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)*

Luthi, Walter, *St. John's Gospel: An Exposition*

Morgan, G. Campbell, *Studies in the Four Gospels*

Newbigin, Leslie, *The Light Has Come*

Schmemmann, Alexander. *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*