



THE REAL LORD'S PRAYER

SERIES: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

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John 17:1-19

37th Message

Gary Vanderet

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We have reached the climax of our study of Jesus' Upper Room Discourse. The seventeenth chapter of John's gospel is one of the most profound passages in all the New Testament. Volumes have been written about it.

Our Lord and his disciples have made their way from the Upper Room through the narrow streets of Jerusalem, and they are about to enter the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus has been speaking to his apostles, and now he begins to speak to his Father. It is evident that he prays aloud so that the apostles may hear what he has to say. After they enter the garden, he goes off by himself to pray in private to his Father, but here his prayer is uttered in public, so that we might hear his communion with God.

John never forgot this scene. I have entitled this message "The Real Lord's Prayer," because what we normally call the Lord's Prayer, that prayer of Jesus which begins with the words, "Our Father which art in heaven . . .", is really the disciples' prayer; it is the prayer that the Lord gave us to pray. Here, then, in John 17 we find the real Lord's prayer. We are going to take this section in just two Sundays. It is a formidable task. We will not be able to go into the kind of detail I would like.

Essentially, Jesus is praying that the truth which he has been teaching the disciples would be incorporated into their lives. That is the way truth becomes real in one's life. It is taught to us, we sense that it is true, and we want to respond to it. And prayer is what translates truth into a life. As Paul put it in Galatians: "Are you so foolish, having begun in the Spirit, are you now perfected in the flesh?" In other words, having become Christians by faith, do we grow as Christians by faith or by self-effort? Our Lord says we are just as dependent on God for our growth as we were for our original salvation. So he introduces us to the truth, and then he prays that we will respond to it.

The prayer divides easily into three parts. First, Jesus prays for himself (verses 1-5); he then prays for the apostles (6-18); and finally, he prays for all believers in all generations to come (19-26). He prays for his own glorification; for the apostles' sanctification; and for the church (those who would believe because of the apostles' teaching), for unification. We will take the first two sections of the prayer this morning. John writes:

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed.

Looking toward heaven was the traditional Jewish posture for prayer. When Jews prayed, they raised their hands and looked up. We are inclined to bow our heads when we pray, but that is merely a cultural thing. Body language in prayer can be significant, however. It says something about the state of our souls. That is why we kneel at times, because kneeling indicates an attitude of contrition, of humili-

ty and dependence on the Lord. Here Jesus looked up, because he was looking to the Father for help. He knew that heaven wasn't up in a spatial sense. He knew that the Father lived in the realm of the spirit; that heaven was another dimension. Nevertheless, he is indicating here an attitude of utter dependence on the Father. Jesus has come to the end of his life. He is on his way to the Garden of Gethsemane to meet those who were going to put him to death. In his moment of crisis, therefore, he looks up toward the Father. That is the important thing. In prayer, it's not posture, but the attitude of the heart that matters.

One of the things I will always remember about Ray Stedman is the many poems and jingles he loved to draw from his memory. One little poem he used to recite concerned this matter of the proper posture in prayer:

"The proper way for a man to pray,"
Said Deacon Lemuel Keyes,
"And the only proper attitude,
Is down upon the knees."

"No, I should say the way to pray,"
Said Reverend Doctor Wise,
"Is standing straight with outstretched arms
And rapt and upturned eyes."

"Oh, no, no, no," said Elder Slow,
"Such posture is too proud.
A man should pray with eyes fast closed
And head contritely bowed."

"It seems to me his hands should be
Austerely clasped in front,
With both thumbs pointing toward the ground,"
Said Reverend Doctor Blunt.

"Last year I fell in Hidgekin's well
Headfirst," said Cyrus Brown,
"With both heels a-stickin' up
And my head a-pointing down."

"And I prayed a prayer right then and there,
The best prayer I ever said.
The prayingest prayer I ever prayed,
A-standin' on my head."

When the chips are down and there is no place else to look, the cry of our hearts is, "Father, help me." This was how Jesus prayed on that evening: "Father, glorify me. Father, sanctify those whom I have given your word. Father, unify those I am leaving behind."

Notice the number of times Jesus refers to God as "Father." Though it is common for us to refer to God as our Father, it was very unusual for a Jew in Jesus' day to do so. They might refer to Abraham's Father, but they would not use the familiar term that Jesus uses over and over here. Verse 1: "Father, the time has come"; v.11: "Holy Father";

v.24: "Father . . . "; v. 25: "Righteous Father." Over and over, Jesus calls upon God as his Father.

I want to say here that I am not reading from the NASB text this morning. For some reason, the NASB uses the Old English pronouns, "thee," "thou," etc., in its translation. This is unfortunate, because it creates the impression that there is a special language of prayer and that we have to revert to these formal pronouns when we talk to God. But these pronouns do not accurately reflect the original text. The language of this prayer is the language of the streets. Our Lord spoke to his Father in the same way he spoke to his disciples. That is the way he taught us to pray: "Our Father, who is in heaven . . ." I once heard the story of man who waxed eloquent in public prayer. He began addressing God as "the foundation of all, the creator of all living," etc. Someone tugged on his sleeve and said, "Just call him Father and ask him for something!" This is what Jesus is telling his disciples.

Now let's look at this first section where our Lord prays for himself. This is proper, by the way; it is not selfish to pray for yourself.

"Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

Twice our Lord prays for glorification. First, he asks to be glorified in and by means of the cross. That is what he means by the words, "The hour has come." All through the gospel we have seen him moving toward this hour with increasing anticipation, the hour of the cross when he will personally and deliberately confront the massed powers of darkness.

"Glorification" is one of those religious words we think we understand until we are asked what it means and then we can't explain it. According to the Westminster Confession, "the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." If that is true we ought to know what it means to "glorify" God. Originally, the word meant, "to think, to seem, to have an opinion." It comes from the Greek word *dokeo*, which simply means "to think or seem." Then it came to have the idea of what one thinks about himself, or the opinion one has of others; and then it came to incorporate the notion of reputation, because it indicated the sum and substance of a person's character and contributions in life.

David Roper told me about an ancient tablet he saw which listed a man's assets and described the contributions he had made to his community. The last line said, "This is his *doxa* [his glory]." In other words, this was the kind of person he was; this was what he was known for. That, exactly, is what glory is. It is the expression, the manifestation of what we are.

Our Lord prays for glorification so that people will see by means of his works on earth the kind of person he was, the stuff of which he was made. And that prayer was answered. As he looked toward the cross he wanted to be strong and courageous, to manifest love and compassion

and strength through his ordeal. Through the offering up of his life he wanted people to see he was the Savior; and in his exaltation and ascension that he was the glorified Savior. That prayer was answered. Our Lord does have a very good reputation. Even among those who think that the church has distorted the gospel message, no one bad mouths Jesus. I have never heard anyone say that he was a liar, a sham, or that he was crazy. No, you very rarely hear that sort of thing. People can't get away from the fact that in the way he cared for people, in the way he taught, and the way he died, our Lord manifested that he was a righteous man. And so he prays that through the cross something that was hidden to the world would be manifested: people would see his character, who he was.

And we know that his prayer was answered, for in the cross his lordship was fully revealed. The cross was the means by which Jesus granted eternal life to all whom the Father had given him. And he defines eternal life as knowing God. That is what real life is. It is a quality of life that lasts forever. We live in a world filled with loneliness, boredom and misery, a world whose offers of adventure and allurements crumble when we try to grasp them. But there is only one Being who can grant us life. So this prayer of Jesus was answered, for that is what he grants today — his redemptive life — to all who will come to him.

Secondly, Jesus prays for the glory that he had in God's presence before the world began. Now that his redemptive work is finished, he asks to take up again the manifestation of his creative glory — the glory that he had in heaven. John began his gospel with these words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten, full of grace and truth." The disciples saw flashes of Jesus' glory, and manifestations of his righteous character in his love and concern for people, but they didn't see everything. What they saw was God in disguise. But here Jesus is praying for the restoration of the glory that was his before his incarnation, and then world would see him as he really is.

Before the world was, Jesus existed in ineffable glory. He was the Creator of a universe so large that it would take one fifty octillion years, traveling at the speed of light, to visit every star. But he freely decided to take that downward plunge of the Incarnation. His return to this unspeakable magnificence would now be enhanced by the glory he acquired on earth. He now reigns in his glorified body, one made even more beautiful by the scars he received to redeem us. This prayer was answered also, as Paul asserts in Philippians: "God has highly exalted him, and given him the name that is above every name; that at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." If we could see Jesus today, we would fall on our knees and worship him, because we would be beholding the glory of God manifested in his person.

Next, Jesus prays for his disciples:

"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours [that is, they were believing Jews; they belonged to God]; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. [in other words, God said, "This is my beloved Son; this is my Messiah," and they took him at his word.] Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. [They knew that the

Lord had the same authority as the Father.] For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. [The Father gave the words to the Son; the Son gave the words to the apostles; and the apostles accepted Jesus' words as God's words.] They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. [They believed that he was the Messiah] I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. [He does not pray for the world here. He does pray for the world on the cross. "Father forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." It's not that he doesn't care about the world (he will give his life for the world), it is simply that he can't pray for the world what he asks for the disciples.]

"All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction [i.e. Judas] so that Scripture would be fulfilled. I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

Jesus' relationship with these men was about to change in a fundamental way: "I will remain in the world no longer," he says, "but they are still in the world." His departure prompts his prayer for their protection and sanctification. These were necessary because the disciples would face two formidable foes: the world, and the ruler of the world, the devil.

It is evident that Jesus is contrasting two different groups, two different kingdoms, two different attitudes: the world, and the apostles. First, the apostles. These men were dependent on God. They believed him and had accepted what he had said about his Son. Then there was the world. Jesus is not referring to the earth, the terrestrial ball we live on; nor is he necessarily referring to the people living on this planet. Rather, he is referring to an attitude that pervades humanity in general, what the Bible calls "worldliness." We all have our own ideas about worldliness. When I came to Christ as a sophomore in college, I was amazed at the lists people had of worldly things Christians shouldn't participate in, things like dancing, going to movies, etc. I don't want to give you a list because I don't want to imply that I am endorsing any of those activities.

Worldliness, however, is not confined to a list of things one should not be involved in. Worldliness, basically, is an attitude of indifference to God. Worldliness says, "I don't need God. I can handle life myself." That is the big lie that Satan has sold the world, the lie that says we can live life on our own, independent of anyone else. That is worldliness: all the basic assumptions made by people who try to live as if God did not exist. Worldliness is the attitude that says the

things that bring comfort and enjoyment in this life are far more important than relationships with people and spiritual values. People want to believe that they are independent, autonomous beings, but they are not. This is what Jesus is praying for his apostles: that they would recognize their dependence on God.

He prays for two things, actually, one thing put in two ways. First, he prays for protection. Verse 11: "Father, protect them by the power of your name . . . While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me; . . ."; and verse 15: "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one." Protect them from the big lie, in other words; protect them from thinking that they can do it by themselves. Jesus does not pray that they will be protected from harm or from persecution and suffering. Actually, almost all of the apostles died a martyr's death. He is praying that when times get tough, their faith won't fail; they will continue to recognize their dependence on the Father.

Notice that Jesus is praying for protection, not isolation. He says in verse 15: "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world." Protection does not include withdrawal, although the church has been tempted along these lines throughout its history. The Christian lifestyle is not to be monastic and escapist. Some Christians avoid unbelievers as much as possible. They try to build themselves a wholly Christian environment, from the womb to the tomb almost. But our attitude is to be one of mission. Jesus says: "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world." It may mean you will become active in the PTA, play racquetball regularly with unbelievers, become a room mother, take an interest in the clerks in the businesses you patronize, coach a team, or befriend your barber or hairdresser. Our Lord is calling men and women who, like himself, can live in the midst of the world, becoming friends of sinners, tax collectors and prostitutes, and not be contaminated by the world.

As we move out in mission, of course, we face the danger of being assimilated into the world and adopting its secular philosophies of life. How can we walk that fine line and avoid falling into isolationism on the one side or conformity with the world on the other? The answer lies in Jesus' second request. He prays, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." This protection that he has been praying for comes in the form of sanctification. "Sanctify" means, "to set apart for a holy use." The word was used in the ancient Greek world to refer the priests and priestesses in the pagan temples who were sanctified because they were set apart for their gods. The NT writers picked up this term and applied it to Christians, because we are all priests, we are all set apart for God. Being sanctified simply means to be God's man or God's woman in the world. Instead of being a woman of the world, you are God's woman. Instead of being the "company's man," you are God's man. And what is it that does this? Jesus says it is the truth. The world lies to us all the time, but it is the truth that will give us the ability to discern fact from error. That is why we need to be reading, believing and acting on this Book: because in the world we are being lied to all the time.

If you don't believe you are being lied to at least a hundred times a day, then during this Christmas season take a pad and pen and write down every lie you hear while you are watching television, listening to the radio or reading the newspaper. Let me give you an example. I heard the follow-

ing commercial a few days ago: "Give her what her heart longs for — a diamond." That's a lie! There may be some diamond merchants here this morning, so let me say that I have nothing against buying diamonds. In fact, I hope to buy one for my wife one day, because when we were buying our wedding rings many years ago, I lost the diamond which I had bought for Kathy's ring. So I have nothing against a husband's buying a diamond for his wife as an expression of his love for her. But if you think that what your wife really longs for is a diamond, you are deceived. Her heart longs to be loved, to be number one in your life, to be more important to you than your job, your good friends, your associates at work, your computer, your car, whatever it is. If you give her a diamond to demonstrate that she is first in your life, that is a different thing, but if you think

that a diamond is what she longs for, you've bought a lie. Scarcely a week goes by without a couple coming into my office for counseling. The wife is so miserable she can't stand it anymore and she has to talk to someone. The husband is clueless. He is content. He has a maid, a mistress, and a mother. He has someone to clean house for him, sleep with him, care for his children, and calm his fears when he is upset. He is so self-absorbed he can't see that what his wife wants is to be loved. She doesn't want to be a maid, a mistress or a mother to him. She wants to be loved.

Sanctification, then, is knowing the difference between truth and lies. It is not a form of religious fumigation. Sanctification is being God's man or woman, not the world's man or woman, and the truth is what will enable us to do that.

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