



Text: John 17:6-19<sup>1</sup>

Series: Life in His Name – The Message of John’s Gospel

Title: Part 36 – “Jesus, what’s on your heart?” (2)

Date: October 30, 2011

Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

In his letter to the Romans the Apostle Paul wrote...

**“Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.” Romans 8:34**

Philip Yancey, an American writer on the spiritual life, once observed...

**“As Jesus once prayed for Peter, now he prays for us... In fact, the New Testament's only glimpse of what Jesus is doing right now depicts him at the right hand of God 'interceding for us.' In three years of active ministry, Jesus changed the moral landscape of the planet. For nearly two thousand years since, he has been using another tactic: prayer.”<sup>2</sup>**

Do you ever wonder: **What is Jesus praying for us?**

I’m very fortunate that my parents are both alive and that they are both believers. I know that they pray for me and my family on a daily basis. Sometimes they tell me what they’re praying for us but beyond knowing the specifics of their prayer I am blessed by the simple knowledge that they are praying for me. If your family are believers and are still alive, they are probably praying for you and its an encouraging and strengthening thing to realize that they love you and care to bring your name before the throne of God.

If you’re a believer in Jesus I want you, just for a moment, to consider the incredible truth that Jesus has your name on his lips as he intercedes for you with the Father. Just take in the fact that Jesus, who is God of very God, prays for you. What is he praying for you and me?

The passage that we’re about to read this morning holds at least a partial answer to that question. I don’t think that the themes mentioned in this passage are exhaustive of Jesus’ intercession for us, but I do believe we can be certain that these things are prominent among his prayers for us.

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<sup>2</sup> © 2011 PreachingToday.com *Philip Yancey, Prayer (Zondervan, 2006), p. 88; submitted by Lee Eclow, Lake Forest, Illinois*



I'm reading this morning from John's Gospel, chapter seventeen, verses six to nineteen. This is God's holy, inspired and authoritative Word. Let's hear it with open ears and hearts and respond to it with active faith.

Jesus prayed...

**<sup>6</sup> "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. <sup>7</sup> Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. <sup>8</sup> For I have given them the words that you gave 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.**

**<sup>9</sup> I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. <sup>10</sup> All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. <sup>11</sup> And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.**

**<sup>12</sup> While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. <sup>13</sup> But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. <sup>14</sup> I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.**

**<sup>15</sup> I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. <sup>17</sup> Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup> As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth."**

The prayer that is recorded in John chapter seventeen is often referred to as Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer." As Jesus prepares for the cross, which is just hours away, he speaks with his Father about what is on his heart. As he faces the end of his earthly ministry and the fact that he will be leaving his disciples as he returns to the Father, he opens up his heart with his Father. Jesus focuses on three important relationships. First, he begins by speaking with his Father about their relationship and Jesus declares that what is on his heart is the Father's glory. He prays...

**"Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you..." John 17:1**

Secondly, in the portion that we've just read, Jesus prays for the disciples that he is about to leave as he returns to the Father. He's spent three intense, high-



pressure years with these men and he is deeply concerned for them and for their future. And thirdly, in verses twenty to twenty-six, Jesus prays for those who will come to believe in him in the future through the witness of the disciples. Jesus prayed...

**“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word...” John 17:20**

Jesus prayed for people who at the time of his prayer were yet unborn but who one day would not only be born, but would also be “born again” by believing in him. He was praying for you and me! And he is still praying for you and me today as we read and study this prayer. We’ll look at the final verses of John chapter seventeen on another day, but today we’re just thinking together about the centre section of Jesus’ prayer.

What is Jesus praying for you and me today?

Jesus prays three prayers for his disciples in his communion with his Father. **First** of all Jesus prays...

**“Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.” John 17:11**

Something dawned on me as I studied this prayer. Typically, when I have read this prayer of Jesus in the past, my attention has been drawn to the phrase, “that they may be one...” and quietly, somewhere in the back of my mind, “Kum-by-ah” starts playing. I start thinking of those “campfire” moments of “oneness” with other believers. But as I read this passage carefully, all of a sudden another song began to play in my spirit. It wasn’t “We Are One in the Spirit” or “Kum-by-ah” but rather “The Doxology”:

**“Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise him all creatures here below;  
Praise him above ye heav’nly host.  
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.”**

Jesus prayer isn’t “Father, keep Harry and Sally one,” but rather, “Father, keep Harry and Sally **one with You** so that they can be one with each other.” The essence of **Jesus’ first prayer for his disciples** is...

***“Father, keep them loyal to you.”***

When Jesus prays that his disciples might be kept by the Father “in your name” he was praying that they would be kept faithful to the revelation of all that God is. The “name” of God represents everything about God: his character, his word, his



will, his mission, his glory. Jesus was asking the Father to keep the lives and witness of his disciples in complete agreement with the person and work of the Father. He wanted them to be “in sync” with the Father in the same way that he was “in sync” with the Father.

In his prayer Jesus declares to the Father that he has been completely loyal to him throughout his earthly ministry. Jesus declared...

**“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world.” John 17:6**

In his life, Jesus “manifested” or made visible, the identity of the Father. John began his Gospel with this declaration...

**“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 have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:1, 14**

Jesus made the glory of the Father visible to us in his being. And Jesus faithfully communicated the Father’s message to us in his words, as well as in his life. Jesus prayed...

**“I have given them the words that you gave me...” John 17:8**

At every step along the way of his earthly ministry, Jesus was in complete “sync” with the Father in everything. He was in “sync” in word and in “sync” in actions. Jesus said...

**“Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise,” John 5:19**

In his life and in his words, Jesus modelled the kind of loyalty he longs for in his disciples. He wants us to be loyal to the person and mission of the Father in the same way that he was loyal to the Father. When “Harry and Sally” are one with the Father like this, then the by-product of their agreement with the Father’s character and word is that they will be one with each other.

A.W. Tozer, a great Christian writer on the spiritual life, once wrote...

*Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshipers met together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be were they to*



*become "unity" conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship. Social religion is perfected when private religion is purified.<sup>3</sup>*

Whenever we start trying to manufacture unity between believers we end up with all kinds of compromises designed, not to please the Father, but to appease one person or group. That isn't the kind of unity that brings glory to the Father. The unity that brings glory to the Father is unity that is rooted in loyalty to His name. That is the kind of unity in which both the Father and the Son are glorified. (John 17:10)

Lee Eclov, a pastor with a keen insight into God's Word and its application to life, tells a story of this kind of Father-loyal, Christ-exalting unity. He wrote...

*Every three years InterVarsity Christian Fellowship sponsors the Urbana Conference, a gathering that challenges university students to get involved in world evangelization. About 16,000 students from around the world attended the 2009 conference.*

*After the main session each evening, students would leave the larger conference auditorium to meet in smaller groups for prayer and reflection. In one of the banquet halls, there was a small group comprised of Chinese students, another group of Taiwanese students, and another group of students from Hong Kong. Large dividers stood between the three. These walls were important, because historically these three peoples have "harbored bitterness and animosity toward one another." They felt it was best to pray and worship each with their own people.*

*But as the Chinese students were praying one night, they told their leader they wanted to invite the other countries to join them. When the Taiwanese students received the invitation, they prayed and sang a little while, and then they opened up the wall divider. It wasn't too much longer before the students from Hong Kong pulled back their divider, and some 80 students mingled together.*

*"In Christ, we are all one family," said one leader. "And [Christ] breaks down political boundaries. In Christ, we have the desire to make the first steps to connect."*

*The Taiwanese students asked the students from China and Hong Kong to lead them in worship. The next night, they invited the Korean and Japanese groups to join them, nations which also had experienced fierce animosity. The leader told them, "**We are living out what we have learned this week in John: This is 'God with us.'**" One girl from China said, "It was a really moving time. This kind of thing would not happen in another situation."*

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<sup>3</sup>As quoted in R. Kent Hughes, *John : That You May Believe*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1999), 400.



But it happened because these Asian “Harry’s & Sally’s” had come to realize their common unity in the Father through faith in Jesus Christ, his beloved and One and only Son.

Being “in sync” with the Father and the Son brought these people, separated by generations of animosity, together in worship and prayer. Jesus’ prayer for these disciples was being answered by the Father as they came to realize their unity in him. But there are forces at work to keep believers from realizing their God-given unity. Jesus prayed...

**“I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.” John 17:14-15**

Jesus’ **second prayer for his disciples** is ...

***“Father, protect them from the forces that tear at their loyalty to you.”***

Jesus highlights two forces that work against loyalty to the Father.

**First** of all, the **“world”** hates the disciples because of their loyalty to Jesus.

Because Jesus’ disciples have accepted his word they have become associated with Jesus. In fact, Jesus calls them his “friends.” Jesus said to his disciples...

**“You are my friends if you do what I command you.” John 15:14**

Being Jesus’ “friend” means that our lives line up with his life. We are on track with his purpose and plan. His word becomes our word; his viewpoint becomes our perspective; we are associated completely with Him.

But why does the world hate us because we’re Jesus’ “friends”? Jesus explained it to his own brothers this way. He said...

**“The world ... hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil.”  
John 7:7**

The world doesn’t want to hear Jesus’ message that it is in rebellion against the Father. The world doesn’t want to be told that it stands under the Father’s judgment because of its sin. Who would want to hear that? It’s only when God’s Spirit enables us to hear that message of warning that we are able to respond to his offer of forgiveness. As long as we think we’re doing just fine we’ll never see



our need of the Father's forgiveness. As long as we think we're good people we'll never hear the message of a Savior who declares that he has come to save sinners. The world meets Jesus' message that he has come to save it with indifference or outright hostility because it doesn't believe it needs to be saved.

That indifference or hostility can be a powerful force. Sometimes the world is a very wounding personal force when it is embodied in friends or family members who reject the message of Jesus that we have accepted and that we long for them to believe. Sometimes the world is a very threatening impersonal force when it is incarnated in the authorities of the nation or the vast mass of the population around us who range themselves against the message of Jesus. The pressure of the world's opposition to the Gospel can become so strong that we are tempted to look for some way to reduce that indifference or hostility by altering the message of Jesus in order to pacify them or appeal to them. Jesus is aware that temptations to compromise the Gospel will come. And he asks the Father to guard us from them.

This week I listened to an interview with a man who pastors a church in the Turkish city of Smyrna. It's a city that's actually mentioned in the New Testament as having a church (Rev 2:8-11). He spoke of one of the early Christian leaders in that city, a man by the name of Polycarp. Polycarp had been led to Christ by John, the writer of this Gospel. He met his death at the hands of the Roman authorities. When asked to recant his faith in Christ and to offer incense to the Roman gods to save his life, Polycarp answered: "Eighty-six years I have served Christ, and He never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"<sup>4</sup> That story of martyrdom is being retold in the lives of believers today all around the world and Jesus is praying for each of them that the Father would keep them faithful to the end.

The temptation to be disloyal to the Father is always present in one way or another. Paul was aware of that pressure. One particular translation captures Paul's awareness of the world's power to move us away from loyalty to the Father. J.B. Philips translated Romans chapter 12, verse 2 this way...

**“Don't let the world squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves toward the goal of true maturity.” Romans 12:2 (Philips' Translation)**

Jesus is praying that the Father will keep us faithful.

**Secondly**, Jesus draws a direct bead on **“the evil one.”** Jesus knew from personal experience that it is the unrelenting purpose of the devil to break our

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<sup>4</sup> As quoted at [www.polycarp.net](http://www.polycarp.net)



allegiance to the Father. That was his line of attack on Adam and Eve in the Garden at the beginning of history and it's still his purpose today.

Jesus had experienced the devil's attack first hand. In Matthew chapter four we read the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness by the devil. After forty days of fasting, the devil came to tempt Jesus and every one of the devil's temptations was, at heart, a temptation for Jesus to deny his allegiance to his Father.

**First**, the devil said...

**“If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” Matthew 4:3**

And Jesus answered...

**“It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Matthew 4:4**

Jesus put his physical well-being into the hands of the Father and he trusted the Father to care for him.

**Second**, the devil took him to a high point and said...

**“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you...’” Matthew 4:6**

And Jesus responded...

**“Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Matthew 4:7**

Jesus came to fulfill the Father's will and he refused to usurp the authority of the Father by telling the Father what to do (John 6:38).

**Finally**, the devil got to the point of the whole episode. Matthew tells us that...

**“the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Matthew 4:8-9**

And Jesus said...

**“Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’” Matthew 4:10**



Each one of Satan's temptations was aimed directly at Jesus' allegiance and submission to his Father and each one of Jesus' responses was a clear declaration of his loyalty to his Father. And each one of his responses was drawn from the Word of God.

And that leads us to Jesus' third prayer for his disciples. Recognizing that their loyalty to the Father would come under relentless attack from the world and the evil one, Jesus prays for his disciples that the Father would equip them with the resource the he himself used in his battle with Satan. **Jesus' third prayer for his disciples** is "Father,...

**"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." John 17:17**

In other words, Jesus is asking,

***"Father, shape them with your word to keep them loyal to you."***

The word "sanctify" comes from the same root as the word, "holy." The root of the word "holy" means "to be set apart." Earlier in his prayer Jesus had referred to the Father as, "Holy Father," (v.11) and now he asks his "Holy Father" to make his people a "holy" people, set apart for him.

What Jesus is asking the Father to do is to shape our lives with His word so that we would increasingly become a people who reflect the character and priorities of God in this world. As we take God's Word into our mind, the Holy Spirit of God takes that word and shape our hearts and our spirits so that the Spirit of Christ is formed in us.

I want you to notice something about Jesus' prayer. He doesn't say that God's Word is "the truth." In fact, he says something even greater. He says that God's Word "is truth." God's Word is the measure of truth for all things. God's Word is the plumb line that establishes what is true. God's Word is the reference point of truth for the universe because it is God's Word.

As we increasingly come to know God's Word, we grow in the stability of our loyalty to the Father because we see that all things, when measured against him are deficient and weak and broken and fallible. As the prophet Isaiah declared...

***"All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades...but the word of our God will stand forever."***  
**Isaiah 40:6, 8**

There is a unifying theme to these three prayers of Jesus for his disciples and I think it can be summed up in one word: **faithful**. Jesus asks the Father to keep



the disciples faithful to His name. He asks the Father to protect them from the forces that would challenge their faithfulness. And he asks the Father to build into the disciples the spiritual resource of his truth that would tune their hearts to faithfulness.

And I believe that **Jesus is praying this for you and for me today**. He is praying that we will be faithful to the Father in our homes, in our relationships, in our workplaces, in our schools. He is praying that we would be kept from the forces that seek to tear down our faithfulness to God. He is praying that God's Word will so shape our minds and desires that we will be "set apart" as God's people in this world.

**Jesus is praying for you today**. He's praying that you'll be loyal to the Father. He's praying that that discouraging or intimidating situation you're facing at school or at work or in your family won't undermine your loyalty to the Father. He's praying that God's Word will shape your response to it and that you will remain faithful to him in it.

**Jesus is praying for you today.**

As we close, I invite you to be quiet before the Lord. I'm not asking you to pray this morning – you can if you wish – but today I simply want you, in this quiet moment, to realize that Jesus is praying over you right now.

- **Invitation to Prayer Ministry**
- **Final Song:** Before the Throne Above
- **Benediction**