

## SANCTIFY THEM BY THE TRUTH

John 17:1-26

Key Verse 17:17

“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”

Looking back on 2021, we suffered a lot through the pandemic. Some had serious illnesses, and others lost loved ones. In addition, two great missionaries, Paul Chung, and Esther Chung—not related, went to be with the Lord. Though we glimpsed heavenly glory through their departure, we were also saddened by their absence. Yet through all things, the Lord helped us fix our eyes on Jesus, who always gives us the victory. As we studied Mark’s Gospel and seven “I Am” passages from John’s Gospel, we could know Jesus better, and grow as his disciples and disciple makers. Families spent more time together due to the pandemic, and we grew closer. As a church, we prayed for the sick and needy, and served each other practically. God answered our prayers, and his love grew among us. In this way, our families and community became more loving. We can see now that the groundwork was laid for a new period of growth.

In 2021 we also began to pray for raising 120 disciples of Jesus on our campuses and among our children. God gave a sign of his answer by sending many new students in the fall semester. A good foundation has been established for effective future ministry. Yet this is only a beginning. How should we advance; how now should we pray to carry out our mission? We can find our way in John 17, which is Jesus’ prayer for himself and his disciples as he concluded his earthly ministry. Jesus’ prayer enlightens us as to God’s perspective on our lives and ministry and gives us clear prayer topics that can guide us in the new year. Through Jesus’ prayer, we can begin 2022 with new spirit, wisdom, strength, hope and vision.

First, Jesus prays for himself (1-5). Jesus had just finished a four-chapter discourse, teaching his disciples. Right afterward, Jesus turned toward God and prayed. Jesus shows us an example. Teaching is not enough; we need to pray. Jesus prayed, “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you” (1). Jesus calls God “Father.” It is the first of six times in

this passage. This reveals his absolute trust and wholehearted love for Father God, and the personal, intimate nature of their fellowship. Jesus gives this same right of intimate fellowship with the Father to all believers (1:12; 20:17). Therefore, amidst the most painful trials, we can approach God, our loving Father. Our dear English friend, Darren Hildrow, experienced terrible pain through his recent cancer and its treatment. At first, he thought God was punishing him. But the Holy Spirit assured him of God's intimate love. Darren's concept of God changed from that of a punisher, to a loving Father. Now he can approach God with confidence. We can all freely come to God, our loving Father, to ask for mercy and grace in our time of need.

Jesus' words "the time has come" refers to his crucifixion as the Lamb of God. The timing and manner of Jesus' death were set by the Father God. From a human point of view, it was such a painful and sorrowful event. But Jesus did not feel sorry for himself. Rather, Jesus sought to glorify God through his death. To do so, Jesus prayed, "Glorify your Son." He was asking the Father to sustain him in his suffering, accept his sacrifice, resurrect him, and restore his original glory. As the Son was glorified in this way, the Father would be glorified through him. The Father's wisdom, power, and love would bring about humankind's salvation. To Jesus, the cross was not shameful; it was the way to glorify God. Jesus wanted to glorify God, even to the point of being crucified. Usually people want to reveal their own glory, no matter what happens to others; but Jesus wanted to glorify God, no matter what happened to him. Jesus had glorified God through his life, and now he wanted to glorify God through his death.

To glorify God is humankind's chief purpose of life. However, sin has made us very sick with a self-glory seeking desire. Self-glory seeking makes people miserable and leads to God's judgment (Ro 2:8). On the other hand, living for the glory of God humbles and purifies us; then we can enjoy true freedom and happiness. Apostle Paul said, "whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1Co 10:31). We can live for the glory of God when we are united with Christ spiritually (Gal 2:20).

Verse 2 tells us more specifically how the glorified Jesus would glorify God. It reads, "For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him." God is glorified in the giving

of eternal life to people who are perishing in their sins. For this purpose God gave Jesus great authority over all people. Jesus has the authority to give eternal life. Eternal life is not just living forever. If we lived forever under the power of sin and death—experiencing sorrow and pain endlessly—it would be unbearable. The eternal life that Jesus gives is a marvelous new life of everlasting fellowship with our Father God. It is a life of meaning, purpose, joy and peace without any suffering or death. It is eternal happiness in paradise. Everyone longs for this kind of eternal life. How can we have it?

Look at verse 3: “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” Jesus equates eternal life with knowing God. The word “know” here does not mean simply knowing that God exists, or facts about God. Rather, it implies having a relationship with him based on personal experience. In his book, “Knowing God,” J.I. Packer says, “One can know a great deal about God without much knowledge of him.” Packer emphasizes that we need to know God personally. He tells us what signs accompany those who know God. They “have great energy for God, great thoughts of God, great boldness for God, and great contentment in God.”<sup>1</sup> Without the knowledge of God, we are like a cut flower; we look alive, but we are dead. When we know God, we have eternal life—a life full of joy and peace. We can know God through his Son Jesus Christ.

In order to glorify God by giving eternal life, Jesus had to finish the mission for which the Father God sent him into the world. Jesus prayed in verse 4, “I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.” Jesus had finished the work of raising his disciples who would succeed his ministry. Jesus’ word “finish” also anticipates his last words from the cross, “It is finished.” Jesus’ death fulfilled God’s salvation purpose. Through raising his disciples and his death on the cross, Jesus glorified God and was ready to leave this world.

How can we glorify God? By singing his praises all day long? This is good. But we must do more. We should be faithful to the mission God has given us until it is finished. As a church we have the mission of raising Jesus’ disciples among college students and our children. All Christians are called to reveal

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<sup>1</sup> Packer, J.I., *Knowing God*, (1973, InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL).

God's love and glory in our daily lives: at home, at school, at work, in our communities. At the last judgment, God will evaluate us; not based on human achievements or social status, but faithfulness to his mission. There can be no excuses. Back in 1970, NASA engineers faced impossible odds as the Apollo 13 spacecraft malfunctioned. Three astronauts' lives were at stake and every effort had to be made for their rescue. NASA engineers adopted the motto, "Failure is not an option." Through their lifegiving efforts the astronauts were saved. We should have this attitude to carry out God's mission, which includes saving perishing souls, with a lifegiving spirit.

What was in store for Jesus, who finished God's mission? Jesus boldly prayed in verse 5, "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." Before coming to this world, Jesus had lived in magnificent heaven, clothed in glory and honor, receiving worship and praise. For a short time on earth, he suffered terribly to bear the sins of all people. Now eternal glory awaited him. Seeing this glory, Jesus endured the cross before him. Many sufferings await us in this new year; they are temporary. After suffering is eternal glory. In this assurance, let's pray that first and foremost we may glorify God in this new year.

Second, Jesus shares how he had served his disciples (6-10). After a most glorious and meaningful prayer for himself, Jesus began speaking of his disciples. In verses 6-10, he tells how he had served them in three ways: by revealing God to them, by giving God's words to them, and by treasuring his disciples. First of all, Jesus revealed God to his disciples. Verse 6a reads, "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world." Here, "revealed" means to make known what was hidden. The disciples had heard about God since childhood. They had many ideas about God; some were distorted. In fact, they did not know God. Jesus revealed God to them through his life. They were drawn into a personal relationship with God. This transformed them into godly people who could reveal God to others. Raising Jesus' disciples begins with revealing God through our lives.

Jesus also gave the words of God to his disciples and helped them to obey. Jesus said, "...they have obeyed your word...For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them" (6b,8a). From the time Jesus called them, he taught the words of God to them diligently even in the upper room.

Bible teaching is not like lecturing in a classroom. It is fighting a spiritual battle. Jesus struggled with his disciples' unbelief and ignorance. Despite their slowness of heart, he taught them the words of truth faithfully, bearing with them. Through his labor of love, at last, their spiritual eyes were opened, and they believed that Jesus came from God. Bible teaching can be slow and laborious. Sometimes we feel that nothing is happening. We are tempted to be impatient or to lose hope. But we must simply continue teaching the word of God. There will be a harvest if we do not give up (Gal 6:9).

Furthermore, Jesus treasured his disciples as God's gift (9-10). Jesus repeated the words, "you gave them to me" (6b,7b,8a,9b), and also said, "they are yours" (9). Jesus knew that his disciples were God's possessions and treasured them. In reality, they were not a lovely bunch—mostly uneducated fishermen and a notorious tax collector. Often, they revealed base desires. Jesus, however, did not look down on them or despise them. Jesus said, "And glory has come to me through them" (10b). Shepherding them was glory to Jesus. Jesus saw them as heavenly princes to be loved, honored, and served with humility and gentleness. They were his crown and joy. They were not a means but an end. We should treasure God's people. C.S. Lewis wrote, "It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship." Our Bible students are heavenly princes and princesses. Serving them is a privilege.

Third, Jesus prays for his disciples and all believers (11-26). In verses 11-19, we find three clear prayer topics Jesus had for his disciples: to be protected, to be one, and to be sanctified. First of all, Jesus prayed for his disciples to be protected. Verse 11 says, "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." Why did the disciples need protection? Jesus mentions two enemies: the world and the evil one. The world hates Jesus' disciples because they are not of the world (14). They belong to the holy God (9,10). They value what is holy and eternal, not the fleeting things of this world. Their transcendence exposes the world's emptiness. So the world hates and attacks them through politics, economy, and social systems. The mastermind behind

this is the evil one— “prince of this world” (12:41). The evil one works to destroy disciples, as he did Judas Iscariot, who tried to live outside God’s protection (12). Mere mortals cannot resist the evil one’s crafty power.

When we consider these two enemies, we may hope that Jesus will take us out of the world. But he does not (15). Rather, Jesus prays for us to be protected by the power of the Father’s name. The Father’s name reveals his character; he is almighty, all wise, eternal, holy, righteous, loving, and good. No one can resist him or thwart him. Under his protection Jesus’ disciples are safe. To grow as Jesus’ disciples we need God’s protection. For this, we should run to God our Father in prayer. Proverbs 18:10 says, “The name of the LORD is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.” Under God’s protection we experience security and have true joy (13).

Jesus also prayed for his disciples to be one (11). This oneness reflects that of Jesus with the Father. It comes from the love of God. As we receive God’s love and love God, we can also love one another with God’s love. We can be one in this love. Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (Jn 13:34-35). Let’s pray to love one another, become one, and reveal Jesus to the world.

Finally, Jesus prayed for his disciples to be sanctified (17-19). Verse 17 says, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.” “Sanctify” means to set apart, to make holy. God’s truth has the power to make us holy. God’s truth can cleanse us of selfishness, pride, lust, and the like and imprint on us godly attributes—love, compassion, righteousness, and goodness. God’s truth can transform any kind of sinner into a holy saint. Holiness is the most important pursuit for a child of God, especially for leaders (2Ti 2:22). An early 19th century evangelical pastor, Robert McCheyne, said, “The greatest need of my people is my personal holiness.” Accordingly, what I need most is to be sanctified by the truth. For this purpose, I am taking Galatians 2:20 as my new year’s key verse. It says, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” May Jesus sanctify me through his word. I also pray that Chicago UBF pastors and elders, staff, and all leaders, may hold God’s word in our hearts and be sanctified. And

furthermore may our church community be sanctified by the truth. This can happen through a deep and prayerful study of God's word with consistent Bible reflection writing and sharing in our meetings. As we are sanctified, we will have love and power to raise Jesus' disciples. Let's pray for ourselves as Jesus prays for us, "Sanctify them by the truth."

For the benefit of his disciples, Jesus sanctified himself. Verse 19 says, "For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified." In what sense did Jesus need to sanctify himself? He was already set apart for God and distinct from the world. Here, "sanctify myself" means being dedicated to God unto his death. And the purpose of his death was that his disciples may be truly sanctified. Ultimately, it is only Jesus' death that sanctifies us.

Finally, Jesus prays for all those who would believe in him through his disciples' message. First of all, Jesus prayed that all believers might become one (21). When believers become one in Christ, the world will believe that God sent Christ and the love of God will be revealed to the whole world (23). When believers fight amongst themselves over small matters, God's name is blasphemed. As Jesus prayed, we should be one in Christ with all who call on his name. For Christians, there is only one God, one Christ, one Holy Spirit, one faith, one hope, and one love (Eph 4:4-6). In verse 24, Jesus prays for all believers to participate in his glory: "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world." Those who participate in the suffering of Christ will also participate in his glory! Finally, Jesus prayed that his love would remain in the hearts of all believers (26).

Today we have learned how Jesus prayed. This can guide our own prayer. Let's pray to glorify God in this new year by finishing our respective missions! Let's pray that we and our Bible students may be protected, that we all may be one, and that we all may be sanctified by the truth. As God answers our prayers, we will have the most fruitful, victorious new year. May God bless us abundantly in 2022!