

November 29, 1998

Jesus's Prayer for You.

Scripture: John 17

Shhhh, somebody is praying. I came into the auditorium and realized somebody was kneeling behind the pulpit stand and she was praying out loud. I realized I had intruded on very sacred ground, and as I turned to go out I heard what she was praying for. The person was a woman and a wife, and she was saying, "Lord, you know I love my husband, but I know you love him and I want him to love you and commit his life to your Son." I realized what a special moment I had intruded in.

Shhhh, somebody is praying. I walked into my mother's room in the middle of the day and she was kneeling beside her bed and I realized, again, that I had intruded on holy ground. I began to realize she was praying for her five children. I arrived just about the time she was praying for me. She prayed that I would be true, that I would be committed, and she prayed that I would live according to His will.

Shhhh, somebody is praying. This time it is Jesus. It is the night before He is to physically die. It is probably about ten o'clock, and by nine o'clock the next morning He would already have gone through various kinds of civil trials and religious trials. At nine o'clock the next morning He would be hanging on the cross, and by three o'clock in the afternoon He would be dead. Here are the last words He prays to God before He dies. Interestingly enough, all of the prayer in the seventeenth chapter of John is for us. He is praying for those of you who have given your hearts and your lives to Christ. We often come to church and sing or quote what is called the Lord's prayer. It better would be called the disciple's prayer. What I am going to read for you in a moment is better called the Lord's prayer, and what is so fascinating about it is what He *doesn't* pray for us. He doesn't pray that you will be rich, healthy, that you will have a long life. I suppose He understood that if you have all the physical blessings, but don't have the spiritual, you are very poor, indeed.

He begins to pray for some very special things. I want to read those things that He prayed for you. There are four of them, beginning in verse eleven of chapter seventeen. *"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."*

The *first* prayer Jesus always prays for you is *that you might be protected*. You need to understand that every day of your life there is a planned attack to destroy your commitment to Jesus Christ. Every day that you live there is a temptation to turn from what you know is right and to do that which is wrong. Before you are a Christian, the

temptations always are to keep you from coming to Christ. If you have never given your life to Christ, every attempt will be made, every person will be put in your path, every circumstance will be designed, to keep you from fulfilling God's great plan for you to come to Christ. After you become a Christian, temptations that come to you are to destroy your Christian commitment and to destroy your testimony. I want to tell you why. The one great theme of Jesus is that He can transform any life; regardless of how deep you are in sin, regardless of how addicted you are, regardless of what your habits may be, Jesus Christ can transform and change you. We put a big sign on the side of every church and in front of every Bible: *Christ can make the difference*. What Satan wants to do in your life is say that is a hoax; there is nothing to it. The theme song of the devil simply is, "It is all a hoax." If he can destroy your commitment and destroy your testimony, then when the rest of us stand and say Christ can transform, the unsaved say, "What about him?" That is the reason the temptation is always there. Because we are constantly being tempted, Jesus taught us in the model prayer, "*I want you to pray, 'Lead me not into temptation.'*" That is simply a confession of your own weakness, "Lord, you know I am weak. Don't put me in a circumstance that is going to be over my head." As long as we day by day confess our weaknesses and depend upon His strength we are able to meet temptation.

I want to tell you how God protects you. If you have never marked in your Bibles 1 Corinthians 10:13, I want you to mark it and commit it to memory. It says, "*There is no temptation that has taken you but such as is common to man.*" Let me tell you what the devil always tries to do. He wants to make you think you are unique. He wants you to think that you are going through something that nobody else does and you certainly can't talk to anybody because nobody would understand. Therefore you are isolated and in your isolation he has you. "*There is no temptation that has taken you but such as is common to man, but God is faithful and will with every temptation make a way to escape.*" What that means is that regardless of what comes into your life, there is a way out. The prayer of Jesus is that you will always sense the way out. Notice how He wants to protect you: *protect them by Your name*. The word *name* in the Bible always means the person's character, the person's essence. What that means is, "Lord, I pray that they will have such a view of You that no other view will be enticing. That they would see You in all of Your love, in all of Your mercy, in all of your glory, and everything else pales into insignificance."

A name that was well known among Baptists twenty years was Dr. Chester Swor. For many years he was dean of Mississippi College in Clinton, Mississippi. He was born with a deformed body, but he had such a radiant spirit and such a beautiful mind that college students, particularly, loved to hear him. He told the story one day about a group of freshmen who had come to Mississippi College, and, like most freshmen, they began to see how far they could push the limits. He noticed one particular group of boys who seemed sometimes to go over the line, but there was always one who seemed to be with the gang but when they went too far he always stopped. Finally Dr. Swor called him in and said, "I've noticed the group you were with, and I've noticed they sometimes go over

the line, but you never do. Tell me why.” The young man said, “Oh, Dr. Swor, I must tell you about my mother. My dad died when I was young, and Mother dedicated herself to my going to college. My mom works three jobs. Dr. Swor, I could never do anything to hurt my mother.”

Once you ever see God through Jesus Christ, the protection is that you never want to do anything to hurt Him.

The *second thing* He prayed for you is down in verse seventeen. “*I want to sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth.*” *Sanctify* is a Bible word. What it means is *to make you useable for God’s service*. Useable for God’s service. Before we were Christians, the way we looked at God is: He is useful to us; He answers our prayers, He gets us out of messes, He takes care of all our circumstances. Once you become a Christian you understand that you are to become useable to Him. What He is trying to do is to work in your life so you can become useable to Him. I don’t know whether you remember the old mythical story that Jesus went back to heaven and all the angels greeted Him, “Jesus, we are so glad to have you back home. You have been gone for thirty-three years, you have started this movement on earth. Lord, we have a question. You have come back, who is going to carry all this on?” “Well, angels, I picked these people and I have entrusted it to them.” “You said, ‘entrusted it to them’? Lord, what if they fail?” He said, “I don’t have any other plan.” You see--with all the hurt, all the need all the way around the world--we are God’s plan. His prayer is that He would continue to mold you, shape you, help you, develop you, that you would be useable for Him. God’s prayer for you is that your commitment would be so deep to Him that He would be able to use you in our world. Someone has said God can use all kinds of hands, but He can’t use dirty ones. He wants to clean you, develop you, and to grow you so that you can become useable to Him.

Notice the *third thing* God prayed for you. It begins down in verse twenty. “*My prayer is not for them alone. I pray for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us that the world may believe that you have sent me.*” The third prayer: *Jesus prays that we would be united.*

One day I took a sheet of paper and I began to list all of the ways that our culture is divided. We are divided many times racially, politically, by gender, economically, and by nationality. Someone has said that if you take a picture of our globe, it is as though somebody had dropped it and it is fractured, it is broken all over. Everywhere you turn today, people want to put people into little categories; and we seem always to be building walls between people. When we come to this time of year--listen to the word again--“Glory to God in the highest...” and *what* on earth? Peace. The tearing down of walls, helping people to be together. The great testimony, Jesus said, is that people will know that I have been sent if I can bring people together. Then they will know this has to be God’s work. What we understand as believers is that when you give your life to Christ

and I give my life to Christ, it doesn't make any difference about color, sex, tribes; it doesn't make a difference about politics. What it all means is that you and I are part of the same family in Christ.

One of the early Roman historians said about early Christians: their law-giver has persuaded them that they are brothers. It is true; and the testimony that this is the work of God is when Christians are united up and down this street. Someone called our street Buford; one of the names it is commonly called is "church" street. What this passage of scripture would tell us is that while there may be different names over the doors, there is one Lord in all of our hearts. The person who spends his time talking about how we are different, instead of talking about how we are alike, misunderstands the prayer of Jesus. Someone gave me a good conversation piece the other day.

Sometime ago a man was on a trip and saw a man carrying a Bible. "Are you a believer?" he asked. "Yes," he answered very excitedly. I learned you can't be too careful. "Do you believe in the virgin birth?" "I accept it." "What about the deity of Christ?" "No doubt." "What about Jesus's death on the cross?" "He died for all people." Can it be that I am face to face with a Christian? Nevertheless, I continued my check list. "What do you believe about the status of man?" "He is a sinner in need of grace." "Define *grace*." "*Grace* is God's doing for man what man can't do for himself." "What about the return of Christ?" "Oh, it is imminent." "What about the Bible?" "It is inspired." "What about the church?" "It is the body of Christ." I was getting to be excited. "Are you a conservative or a liberal?" He was getting interested, too. He said, "I am a conservative." My heart began to beat faster. "What is your heritage?" "I belong to the Southern Congregationalist Holy Son of God Dispensation's Triune Convention." "That is mine. What branch do you belong to?" "I belong to the pre-millennial, post-tribulation, non-charismatic, King James, one-cup communion." My eyes misted and I had only one other question. "Do you all use a wooden pulpit or fiber glass?" "Fiber glass," he reported. I withdrew my hand and stiffened my neck and muttered under my breath as I walked away, "Heretic."

The *fourth part* of His prayer, verse twenty-four, "*Father I want those you have given to Me to be with Me where I am, to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.*" The last prayer of Jesus for you is that when the end comes for you He wants God to bring you to be with Him. He said, "I tell you what I want to do. I tried to describe it in the Bible, but now I want to walk you around and let you see. I tried to tell you that in my Father's house were many mansions; I want you to see the mansions. I tried to tell you this was like a city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven as a bride adorned for her husband; I want you to see it all. I want you to see all the glory that I have." The prayer of Christ is that one day He will take you by the hand and He will say, "See. Beyond imagination, see. I want you to be with me."

There is a little story that has been going around now for about a year. A lady came to see her pastor, she had just learned that her days were very limited. She said, "I want to talk with you about my funeral arrangements," and they did that. At the end she said, "I have a strange request." She reached in her purse and she pulled out a fork. She said, "Do you mind if I be buried with a fork, like this?" He said, "Sure, why?" She said, "My mother was the best cook in the community. People used to come over to our house on any excuse, just to eat mother's cooking. One of the things she really was known for was her desserts. When everybody would eat the main course, mom would say, 'Keep your fork. The best is yet to come.'" It wasn't many months later that people went to the funeral home and saw their friend in the casket with a fork. Somebody said, "Why a fork?" "The best is yet to come." He wants to bless, guide and direct your life here. But in His prayer he assures us that it doesn't end here; the best is yet to come.

Some of you in this room need the first part of the prayer. You need *protection* because you feel that your testimony is being destroyed. Some of you need to hear the word *to sanctify* because you need to be made useable to Him. Some of you need to hear the word *unity*, and all of us need to hear the word of *hope*.