

Mission Critical Requests

John 17:6-19

We'll be looking at another part of Jesus' prayer in the Upper Room in John 17 this morning, and to start, I want us to think about war, and the difficulty of winning a war... We have several wars going on right now in the world, and some of them have been going on for a long time. I'm not a big history buff, but I remember hearing or reading about several of the big wars that have happened and it seems like one of the things they have in common is that they wage on for years and years. Even when one side seems superior or has decisive victories at the beginning, as long as the other side has provisions and ammunition, they can keep fighting and the war can drag on.

A lot of times, the side that ends up losing the war is the side that runs out of supplies and ammunition first. They might have all the victories to begin with and appear to have the upper hand, but as soon as they start running out of supplies and ammunition, the war takes a drastic turn and they end up having to surrender. You can't win a large-scale war if you don't have the mission critical resources to do so. The mission might be noble. The cause might be just. The war might begin with a lot of success. But if you don't have what you need, you're going to lose.

As followers of Christ we've actually entered a war and we've been given a mission. That mission is to preach the good news and make disciples of every nation. But we have an enemy – Satan and the spiritual forces of evil. He is trying to stop us and he has a lot of firepower here on earth. In fact, the Bible says the whole world is currently under his influence in one way or another. We are fighting a spiritual battle against an enemy who wants to destroy us and ruin our mission.

This is a battle that's been going on for a long, long time. Some of us have been fighting for decades and have battle scars and wounds to prove it. It's easy to grow weary. How are we going to keep fighting until the mission is complete? What do we need to ask God for so we have what we need?

This morning, we are going to look at how Jesus prayed for his disciples and it's an interesting prayer because of the situation they were in. Jesus had led

them for 3 years and given them everything they needed to accomplish his mission here on earth, but in a few short weeks he would be going back to the Father and they would be left on earth to carry out the mission themselves. He would no longer be right there with them to give them what they needed and it would be difficult.

So as he closed the evening in prayer in the Upper Room he prayed for his disciples and asked for three things from the Father to ensure their success. I want you to see what he asked for because they are the same things we need today to succeed in battle and continue our mission.

Read John 17:6-8.

“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. ⁷Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. ⁸For 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.

So Jesus begins by reporting on the success of the mission the Father had given him. The Father sent him into the world to gather and train a group of disciples that he gave him and prepare them to continue to carry out the mission once he returned to the Father. And in these verses he talks about what he did and how the disciples responded.

He says he manifested the Father to them and taught them what the Father had given him, and the disciples responded to him and his teaching in several ways. Verse 6 says they kept God’s word that Jesus taught them. Verse 7 says they were convinced that everything Jesus received and taught was from the Father. And verse 8 says they received Jesus’ teaching and came to know and believe that he was sent from God.

In other words: Mission accomplished! Like he said just before this in John 17:4: *“I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.”* The seeds had been planted and taken root in the disciples’ lives and once Jesus’ death and resurrection were complete in the next 3 days, all the disciples would need to move forward was the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Father had entrusted the disciples to him, and he had faithfully accomplished the work the Father called him to do. So he reports on that, and then he begins to ask the Father for requests to ensure the success of the disciples and the mission after he left. There are three things he asks for. The first is in the next few verses...

Read John 17:9-13.

I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

So he begins by saying how he's praying for his disciples who belong to him and the Father and acknowledging that they would still be in the world after he left. He knew things would be difficult and he's praying for his disciples so they would continue to experience his joy. In verse 11 we see his first request. He asks that the Father would keep them in his name, so that they would be one, even as he and the Father are one.

What does it mean to keep them in his name? There's a good clue in verse 12 where Jesus says that he had kept them in the Father's name, and he did that by guarding them. In what he says about Judas after that, you can see that he was guarding them from being lost – or going the way of worldliness and condemnation like Judas did. So he kept them in the Father's name by keeping them in the faith and in the truth and in the way of the Father. And now he's asking that the Father would continue to keep them in his name after he left.

He asks the Father to do that because he wants his disciples to “be one even as he and the Father were one.” At that point, I think they already had that kind of oneness because Jesus had kept them in the Father's name and they

were of one heart and one mind under his leadership. They had fellowship with one another and had the same faith, the same beliefs, the same purpose, and the same gospel. This unity was critical to their joy and the success of the mission and Jesus knew it must continue after he left, so he prayed that the Father would keep them in his name.

Paul wanted the same thing in the churches he planted, so after telling the Philippians of his desire for them to “stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel” in chapter 1, he wrote this in Philippians 2:1-2: “*So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.*” The unity of the church under the headship of Christ was critical for the success of the mission.

That’s what Jesus was asking for in his first request for his disciples. The second is in the next couple verses...

Read John 17:14-15.

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. ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.

So he acknowledges that his disciples would face hatred and opposition in the world, and based on what he said earlier that evening, I think he has the opposition and hatred of their Jewish community in mind. They were no longer part of that world. Once they started following Jesus, they crossed a line and were hated because of it. So just like Jesus faced hatred and persecution, they would too.

But his request to the Father was not that they would be taken out of the world in order to escape hatred and persecution. Their mission was to preach and minister in the world in order to win people to Christ and make disciples, so they couldn’t leave. Instead, he asks that the Father would keep them from the evil one. This is Satan, our enemy, the prince of the power of the air, who is actively working in the world to keep people from knowing God, and to turn God’s people away from following Jesus. Here, I think the contrast with what

happened to Judas is helpful in understanding Jesus' request. The evil one destroyed Judas and Jesus was praying that the Father would protect his remaining disciples from that happening to them. So, "Don't take them out of the world, because their mission is to reach the world, but keep them away from the destructive schemes of Satan."

Hatred and opposition from the world, as difficult as that would be, would not destroy what the disciples were called to do, but giving in to temptation or fear or complacency or backsliding would. So Jesus was asking the Father to protect them from that.

His third request is in the last few verses...

Read John 17:16-19.

¹⁶They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

This request acknowledges that the disciples are not of this world, but they had been sent by Jesus into the world to carry out his mission. They are to be light in the darkness. They are to represent Jesus to the world. And the only way they'll do that is if they're distinct from the world. Therefore, Jesus prays that the Father would "sanctify them," or set them apart, in the truth, which is the word of God. He's asking that the Father would transform them, according to his word, so they would be distinct in the world.

A couple of supporting passages come to mind. One is in Romans 12:2 where Paul writes this command to the church in Rome: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Another is in Philippians 2:14-16: "*Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.*"

Paul is telling them to be sanctified by the word of truth so they'll be distinct in the world.

Jesus' prayer for his disciples was that the Father would transform them according to the truth of his word so they would be distinct from the world and thus be his representatives to the world and carry out his mission.

So Jesus asked the Father for three things that would be critical for his disciples to carry out the mission:

- Keep them in your name, that they may be one.
- Keep them from the evil one.
- Transform them according to the truth.

Brothers and sisters, and fellow soldiers in the battle, these are the same things we need to ask the Father for today so that we have everything we need to fight the battle: "Father, keep us in your name so we will be one as you are one. Father, keep us from the evil one. And, Father, transform us according to the truth." Let us learn to ask for these things and then cooperate with him to do our part to receive them in our lives.