

Sermon from 05/04/2008



Know This Prayer

Texts: 1 Peter 4:12-14, John 17:1-11

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"I'm just preparing my impromptu remarks."
Winston Churchill

There used to be a commercial several years ago from E.F. Hutton—an insurance and investment firm—and their advertisement slogan, that you could probably recite by heart was: *"Shhhhhh! When E.F. Hutton talks...people listen."*

Within this prayer found in John 17 prayed by Jesus—that the Church has come to call Jesus' high priestly prayer (because intercession is always the function of a priest)—Jesus is praying conversationally with God His Father.

So as Jesus is speaking here—"Shhhhhh! We need to listen!"

And amongst one of the many questions that this passage raises for us is this: Does God answer the prayers of those who are not followers of Jesus?

I mean what is the basis for God answering the prayers of those who do not follow Him?

The reason I pose this question is because many people are under the assumption that God is willing to receive the prayers of those that DO NOT believe in Him.

I mean listen to verse 7-9: *"Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood **that I came forth from You**, and they believed that **You sent Me**. 9" *I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours...."**

Jesus' high priestly prayer is not a generalized prayer for all humanity.

Uh-uh. It is not a prayer for the people of the nations.

It is not a prayer for the down and out, the homeless, the hungry or the broken-hearted.

This high priestly prayer is a prayer for the followers of Jesus and it represents solidarity in the relationship between Father & Son & those willing to follow.

As Jesus later says in verse 21: *"even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me."*

It's that simple.

Well, if this prayer does not reflect a concern for the world, what does it reflect?

It is a prayer to reaffirm God's ownership over our lives!

What does verse 6 say: *“I have manifested Your name to the men whom **You gave Me** out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me.”*

Doesn't Saint Paul say in Romans: *“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become **slaves** to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.”*¹

I frequently use the phrase / title, “Servant-Leader” around here to refer to our Consistory—which is our governing body—not of politicians, but of spiritual giants!

In the Greek, the word for servant here is δουλωθεντες δε τω θεω (slaves of God).

We are ‘slave’-leaders.

We are slaves to God who is Lord & Master of the affairs of this life & the next.

Doesn't Jesus say in Matthew 28: *“all authority has been given unto Me in heaven and on earth”?*

That sounds pretty far-reaching to me.

Well today we don't much like the idea of slavery.

Our American instincts support the notion of personal freedom, liberty, and justice for all.

We even fought our bloodiest war ever—the Civil War—to end the institution of slavery in the South—just across the Ohio River.

But the bonds of a slave of Jesus Christ are not chains, but love!

The life of a slave of Jesus Christ is not despair, but hope!

The length of your servanthood isn't determined by your race, gender, or ethnic background, but by your faith!

In this kind of slavery—there is a care beyond your wildest dreams.

Jesus—the Lord of life everlasting, joy unspeakable, and peace that passes all understanding—owns your very soul.

*And all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them.*²

And so your slavery and mine is turning out to be a pretty good deal.

In exchange for our slavery AND OUR OBEDIENCE, we receive life, joy & peace
But we also receive something as equally as important as life, joy, and peace...and it is God's Word.

Jesus says to His Father: *“for the words which You gave Me I have given to them.”*³

Today, we live in an age of opinion, interpretation, and perception.

Political commentators on TV, at the moment, want us to understand that it is not truth and falsehoods that matter—rather it is PERCEPTION!

¹ Romans 6:22.

² John 17:10.

³ John 17:8a.

You see, you could tell the truth, but if it is perceived as a lie or a falsehood, then IT IS a lie or a falsehood.

Conversely, you could tell an outright lie—on the campaign trail, for example (what in Britain is called a ‘Porky Pie’)—and if it is perceived as being true—then IT IS the truth.⁴

But this is not Jesus’ truth!

Jesus’ truth rests not on opinion, interpretation, and perception, but upon the integrity of the Word that the Father gave to Jesus to share.

And so the Gospel is not a fairytale.



It is not a book of hearsay. It isn’t a text of interesting contemplation.

The Gospel is all about how Jesus faithfully shared EVERYTHING that God the Father wanted us to know about finding Him.

What is this Word?

What is this Truth?

Jesus says it Himself: *“and they received them (God’s words) and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me.”*⁵

The Christian Scriptures, and the Christian faith, is not comfortable with nor does it accept that Jesus was just another prophet of God—a good guy with some wise words to share.

The testimony of the Christian faith is that you BELONG—lock, stock, & barrel—to Jesus—not to Buddha, Moses, or Mohammed!

You see the audacity of the Christian faith and the life of Jesus is that Jesus claims ownership of you.

The second half of verse 6 says, categorically, *“You gave them to Me.”*

Say with me: God gave me to Jesus!

There’s no other faith that makes that claim!

Oh, there are faiths that have followers of wise prophets, and spiritual teachers, but there is only one faith where God makes a claim upon you, your life, and your destiny—and that is the faith we follow.

As Ephesians 4:5 says, *“There is one Lord (not ten), one faith (not world religions), and one baptism.”*

So, how will you live now that God has put a claim in upon you?

You see Jesus is God’s claim ticket.

⁴ Reference the sexual scandal of Ohio’s Attorney General, Marc Dann, at: <http://news.cincinnati.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2008805030357>. Note the salaries the people involved in this scandal are being paid.

⁵ John 17:8b

I enjoy classical music and through the years, Janet & I have attended more than one symphonic or philharmonic orchestra performance.

And during those performances, I have often checked our coats in at the 'Coat Check'.

But the only proper way for me to make a claim to retrieve our coats again is if I have my Coat Check Claim Ticket.

You see, one day, God will come and collect His own.

He will not collect the entire world—remember Jesus isn't praying for the entire world.

He will just come to collect His own.

And the singular way, in which He will identify you, is only if you are holding the claim ticket called 'Jesus'.

There is one other significant aspect about this prayer for you and me—and everyone else who will believe through you & me.⁶

And it's this: that if Jesus lays claim to own you—He also insists upon guarding you!

Today people feel more vulnerable than ever.

They feel vulnerable to random crime, online bullying, peer pressure, job loss, junk mail, identity theft, priests, pastors, teachers, and cops (those once deemed to be safe in our society).

We build in levels of safeguards in our society today with background checks, DNA profiling, and multiple references because no one can be trusted anymore—no one can be taken at their word any longer.

Indeed, basic trust is a very fragile and precious commodity of 21st century relationships.

And so in this age where folks feel that they can easily be abused, used, mistreated or lied to...Jesus says, "*I'm going to guard those that follow.*"

Say, ***Jesus is guarding me*** with me.

Jesus as Good Shepherd: Yes!

Jesus as Saviour: Yes!

Jesus, even as soon coming King: Alright.

But Jesus as Sentry?

Jesus as Bouncer?

Jesus as Passport Control?

Jesus as Guard who never leaves His post and is always vigilant against all the influences that might corrupt, and destroy your soul!

I have many times taken a wrong turn.

⁶ see verse 20.

I have many times entertained the idea of allowing the wrong influence into my life.

I have frequently said, "I am better off stumbling around in the darkness than walking in the Light."

And every time, my Guard has stepped in to protect me.

I started this message with a radical proposition and that is that God only hears the prayers of His followers—and I end it with a similar radical proposition.

God only guards and protects His followers.

So, if you're not being guarded, have you believed His Word?

If you're not being guarded, are you in league with the values of the world, rather than the life of Christ (as verse 14 suggests)?

If you're not under guard, then perhaps you haven't yet experienced His love:

Verse 26 says, *"I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."* Amen.

Questions For Reflection:

1. Does God answer the prayers of those who are not followers of Jesus?
2. In what way is Jesus like a priest for us?
3. Why is it, do you think, that Jesus doesn't pray for the world?
4. How are we "slaves" of God? Is this good or bad?
5. What do you make of Jesus' statement: "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth"?
6. Read the online article on State of Ohio Attorney General Dann. What does his refusal to resign have to do with truth?
7. In worship last Sunday, we all said together: "God gave me to Jesus." How do you understand this truth in your life?
8. What does Ephesians 4:5 say & how does it relate to the truth?
9. How is Jesus God's claim ticket?
10. Last Sunday we also said together: "Jesus is guarding me." How does Jesus guard you?
11. What is John's reason for Jesus making God's name known to His disciples (see 17:26)?

