

John 17:11b-17

If you've ever been in the **hospital**, or faced some kind of **traumatic** event in your life, then you know that at those times people often have difficulty knowing what to **say** to you. They want to bring us **comfort**, but at the same time they don't want to sound **trite** or **insincere**. One of the things that's usually very **comforting** to hear are the simple words, "I've been **praying** for you," or, "We said a **prayer** for you in church today." It's **comforting** to know that people are **concerned** about us, and that they're bringing our needs to our Father in heaven. This morning we can receive great comfort and confidence in knowing that **Jesus Himself Prays For Us**. He prays for our **protection**, and He prays for our **sanctification**.

The words of our text are part of what is usually called Jesus' **high priestly** prayer. This is the **longest** prayer of Jesus recorded in the Scriptures. It comes at a very **pivotal** moment in His life on earth, and ultimately, in the history of our **salvation**. Jesus prayed this prayer in the presence of His **disciples** on Maundy Thursday. We can't tell from Scripture if it was prayed while He was still in the upper room in Jerusalem, or while they were walking toward the Mount of Olives. But what we **do** know is that it took place **after** Jesus had instituted the **Lord's Supper**, and **before** He went off by Himself in the Garden of Gethsemane. This was a prayer that Jesus wanted His disciples to **hear**, and since it's **recorded** for us in the **Bible**, He obviously wanted **us** to hear it as well.

The section of the prayer we're looking at this morning is the part where Jesus was praying specifically for His **disciples**. Just think about it. In a very short time Jesus was going to be **arrested** in the Garden of Gethsemane. The **whips**, the crown of **thorns**, and the **nails** were all just **minutes** away from Him. And yet, whom was Jesus **thinking** of, and **praying** for at that time? It wasn't for **Himself** - it was for His **disciples**. Jesus knew that the days, months, and years which lay **ahead** for them would be very **difficult** for them to face. **Everything** in their lives was going to drastically **change**. They would no longer have Jesus visibly **with** them as He had been in the **past**, when He **walked** with them from town to town, and **taught** them day after day. Instead, many severe **difficulties** and **temptations** would be coming their way. So, the **first** part of Jesus' prayer for them is that they would remain **protected**. He prayed, "*Holy Father, **protect** them by your name, which you gave to me. While I was **with** them, I kept those you gave me **safe** in your name. I protected them and not one of them was **destroyed**, except the son of **destruction**, so that the **Scripture** might be **fulfilled**.*"

For three years, Jesus had been **guarding** and **protecting** these disciples. Think about how much **time** Jesus had spent with His disciples - **instructing** them in the faith - performing **miracles** in their presence - **correcting**, **rebuking** and **encouraging** them with the Holy **Scriptures**. Jesus invested His **time** in them for a **purpose** - and the purpose was to **protect** them from evil, and to **keep** them in the one true **faith** so they could become His **witnesses**. During His lifetime here on the earth, Jesus had cared for them **so well**, that none of them had been **lost** - except for **Judas**, whose tragic decision to **betray** His Lord and fall **away**, had sealed his own fate.

But **now**, in a very short time, Jesus would be **leaving** His disciples, and returning to His Father in **heaven**. He wanted them to **know** that even though their relationship was going to be **different**, they were **not** going to be **unprotected**. In this prayer, Jesus was entrusting their protection into the hands of His heavenly **Father**. That knowledge must have brought the disciples great **comfort**, even as Jesus prayed to His Father with **these** words, "*But now **I am coming to you**, and I am saying these things in the **world**, so that they may be filled with my **joy**.*" Even though Jesus was going to be **leaving** His disciples, they could be sure that in the **difficult** times which were to come, and in the most **severe** trials which they would encounter, they would still be able to find **joy** in their lives, because their **Heavenly Father** was still **watching over** them and **protecting** them.

Jesus' words give **us** the **same** joy. As we face the troubles and anxieties of living in this sinful world, there are times when we can start to feel as though we're all on our **own** - as if we are going through these trials and tribulations all by **ourselves**. All too often even the people we consider to be our **friends** - people whom we should be able to **rely on** when we need their **support** - let us **down**. At times we might even be tempted to think that **God Himself** has abandoned us - that He has **given up** on us - that He no longer **cares** about us. But that would be **impossible**. The **disciples** didn't need to **worry** about being left **alone** or being **unprotected** - and neither do **we**. That thought **never** even has to cross our minds, because God Himself has **promised** us, "*I will **never** leave you, and I will **never** forsake you,*" and God **always keeps** His promises.

When we're tempted to think that Jesus no longer **cares** for us, it's good to remember this **high priestly prayer** which Jesus prayed for His **disciples** on Maundy Thursday, and then to remember where Jesus **is**, and what He's **doing right now**. He's in **heaven** - where He's sitting at **God's right hand**, and **praying** the very same prayer for **us**. He's **interceding** with the heavenly Father on **our** behalf - He's **pleading** for our **protection**. And God the Father **answers** that prayer

through **His Word**. Jesus said, *“I have **given** them **your word**. The world **hated** them, because they are not **of the world**, just as **I** am not **of the world**.”*

God does **so much** to **protect** us, and to keep us **safe** from the **world** around us - the world which **hates** us. He sends His holy **angels** to **physically** protect us. But even more than **that**, each and every day He **protects** what is **most precious** to us - our eternal **soul** - and He **does** it through **His Word**. Jesus **freed** our souls from the **slavery** of sin, through the work of the **Gospel** - daily providing us with the **message** that Jesus **lived** for us, and **died** for us - that Jesus **defeated** our greatest enemies; **sin**, **death**, and the **devil** - that on the **cross** Jesus **purchased** and **won** eternal **salvation** for us. As our **High Priest**, Jesus keeps our souls **protected** by continually nurturing them with His **Word**, which proclaims for us His promises of **grace** and **mercy**. Jesus will **continue** to keep our souls **safe**, until we rest for all eternity with Him in **heaven**. Nothing can take that Gospel truth **away** from us, and because of that **truth**, we will **always** have joy.

As our text continues, we see that Jesus also prayed for something **else** for His disciples in His high priestly prayer. In the **final** verse of our text, Jesus prayed, *“**Sanctify** them by the **truth**. **Your Word** is **truth**.”* Jesus prayed for the **sanctification** of His disciples. **Sanctification** is one of those **big, fancy** words that we **read** in the Bible, and that we **hear** in church and Bible study. It’s an **important** word, so it’s also important that we understand what it **means**. Sanctification means to be **set apart** for God. It means to be taken **off** from the **worldly** path of wicked and sinful ways, and to be placed **on** the path which matches **God’s will**. God wants **us** to think and act **differently** from the rest of the world - to live according to a **higher** standard. And what **is** that standard? It’s the truth of **God’s Word**. As the disciples lived using the Word of God as their **guide**, their lives would be truly **special**. Their lives would serve as an **example** for others, and as a **witness** for the impact of the **Gospel** on a person’s life.

Jesus’ prayer for **us** is the **same**. He wants us to be **sanctified** - to be **set apart** for God and His purposes. And the tool which God uses to **carry out** that sanctification in **our** lives is **also** the same - it’s His **Word**. The world doesn’t understand the **value** of God’s Word. And because of that it **attacks** the Word, and wants us to **reject** it as the **truth** which guides our lives. Jesus’ prayer is that we would **not** be led **astray** by them - that we would **never** doubt the **truth** of God’s Word. The **fact** of the matter is that God has opened our **eyes** to **see** the truth of His Word, and as we turn to that Word again and again, we only become **more** convinced that what God’s Word says is **true**, while what the **world** says is full of **lies**.

God doesn't leave any stone **unturned** in His Word. In it He **convicts** us of our **sin** with His **Law**, and in it He also shows us our **Savior** from sin in the **Gospel**. God's Word also serves as a wonderful **guide** for our daily lives, as we strive to think and act **differently** from the world around us. That doesn't mean that when we become Christians, we immediately become **perfect** and no longer continue to **sin**. Our sanctification is a life-long **process** - a process in which we continue to **grow** - and that **growth** isn't always **steady**. Often there are **setbacks** along the way, and our walk with Jesus becomes like riding on a **roller coaster** - with **highs** and **lows** - **good** days and **bad**. But our ultimate **goal** is that each day we may strive to live lives which are **more** sanctified than the day before. That's Jesus' prayer for us too, and it's a prayer that is **answered** every time we turn to God's Word for **strength** and **guidance**.

Jesus' prayer in these verses certainly brought comfort to His **disciples** at a time when they **desperately** needed it. There will also be times in our lives when we will need that **same** comfort. Maybe it'll be **today**. Maybe it'll be **tomorrow**. Maybe it'll come somewhere further down the **road**. But when that day **comes** - and it most certainly **will** - remember the prayer which Jesus prayed for His **disciples**, and realize that He's praying those words for **our** benefit as well. Our ascended Lord cares about our well-being. **Jesus Prays For Us**, and He will **continue** to pray for us, offering prayers which will always be **answered** by the heavenly Father as He **protects** us and **sanctifies** us every day of our lives. Amen.