



The Focus for the Mission: What's on Jesus' Heart

Behold Our God – Read the Bible for Life Series #47

John 17:13-19

Pastor David Sunday

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The High Priestly Prayer

Please open your Bibles to John 17. I struggled in preparing to preach this Sunday more than usual, not because this passage leaves me with so little to say but because it is so sublime. Where else can you go in Scripture to hear God talking with God—God the Son pouring out His heart to God the Father? As I thought about speaking on this prayer, it almost seemed profane to comment on such an astonishing outpouring of Jesus' heart. It almost seems like it would be better to just sit back, put our hands over our mouths, be quiet and listen to this passage, saying, "Amen," to Jesus' prayer, to join in supplication with Him. But these are words that need to be studied because our Savior prays with authority and He prays about things we can be assured God intends to do in our lives.

When you hear the Savior praying for these things, you should be encouraged that they are things that will become realities for God's people because Jesus asked for them. It is appropriate that we should set our hearts upon asking God to make these things a reality for us; to do in our lives those things our Savior was asking Him to do in our lives right before He went to the cross to die. "Before He sprinkled us with His blood," Spurgeon said, "He sanctified us with His supplications." He died to make this prayer a reality.

In my office I have four volumes of sermons that Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached on this chapter (about 50 sermons on one chapter). Instead of trying to focus on everything that Jesus said, I'm going to hone in on one thing I think is especially important for us as God's people. As we think about our upcoming Mission Conference, I want us to focus on one theme, looking particularly at John 17:17-19. Listen to these words from Jesus:

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Let's pray.

Father, I plead with You now for fresh faith, energy and focus, that I may proclaim Your Word. I pray that You would give faith to Your people to hear this prayer of their Savior for them, not only as expressive of what we are not yet but also as a promise of what we will be because Jesus asked for it and died to make it a reality. Give us faith, Lord, and help us enter into the desires of our Savior's heart for us—that His desires would become our own. We ask it in His holy name and for His glory. Amen.

We are on a Mission from God

You may have heard of a test called the MMPI—the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. Maybe you've had to take that test in applying for a job. I understand that when government workers apply for positions that would put them in contact with highly classified information, they need to take this test. It's designed to reveal a particular personality type and expose some possible personality disorders. Government uses it. Seminaries and Bible colleges often make pastors or potential pastors take this test before graduation and sending us off to people like you.

When I take these tests, I find myself wondering, "Why did they ask that question? What will be the right answer? If I say this am I going to get a red flag on my file?" There's a question on the MMPI that says, "True or False: I believe that I am on a mission from God." Think about that. They're looking for a personality disorder. What do you say? I can understand that if you think you have your own personal mission—you think you're God's Messiah in the world—there is a problem. But biblically speaking, what's the right answer to that question? For a believer in Jesus, I believe I am on a mission from God. Is that true or false?

I've noticed in the world today, the word "missionary" is not very popular and has to be used with great care. In fact, many people we have working overseas do not use that title because all of the connotations wrapped up in it. When we were recently in Europe, we were asked a few times, "Why are you over here?" I would say, "We came to visit our missionaries from our church." I felt at times that answer pretty much shut down our conversations and it made me wonder what people are thinking. "Missionary" in our society sounds negative because people think missionaries want to convert them to the

missionary's point of view. In truth, as Christian missionaries, our goal is to lift up Jesus and see people brought to faith in Him.

As Christians, when we hear the word “missionary,” we usually think of it in a positive term. We're looking forward next weekend to learning more about the work of our missionaries—especially those overseas and those who are working in particular on ground breaking works right here in our own area. We think positively about missionaries. But I want to press it a little closer to you today and ask, “Do you believe you are on a mission from God? Do you see yourself as sent by God into a world that needs Jesus to represent Him in this world?”

Jesus says we are on a mission from Him. Look at verse 18. *“As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”* Jesus is phase one of God's mission—the mission that was announced way back in the Old Testament when Adam and Eve fell into sin in the Garden of Eden. God said, “I'm going to send a seed of the woman Who will crush the serpent's head. He's going to bring victory and salvation to God's people.” Then we saw that promise of the mission unfolding throughout the Old Testament as we looked at it over this past year. Remember the promises to Abraham where God said,

“Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:1-3).

This design of God, this mission of God, has been unfolding throughout the Old Testament and comes to fruition when God the Son comes into the world in Bethlehem. He comes to bring glory to God in the highest and peace to men on whom God's favor rests. Through His perfect life, Jesus lives in our place the righteous life that we fail to live and then He goes to the cross and dies as our substitution—our sacrifice—paying the debt for our sins. He then rises from the dead to bring about the New Kingdom, the new creation, where His Spirit will be poured out in our lives and we become part of God's eternal Kingdom. All of this came to fruition in Christ but continues to be fulfilled today in us.

As I was thinking about this verse, I was reminded afresh that there aren't many missions of God—there's one mission of God that He promised in the Old Testament, brought to fruition in Christ and that He's continuing to bring about today through the risen Christ in His church. I found this statement by Bruce Milne helpful. “The one mission of God has two phases. The first is that of the Son, Jesus, in His incarnate life—in His humanity.” That's what we read about in the four Gospels. That's phase one of the one

mission of God. The second phase of that one mission of God is that of the Son, Jesus, in His risen life through His people. It is God's mission through Christ that continues today through us! We don't have to start a new mission—a new work. He is in our midst as we go forth into the world in His name, for His glory, carrying on the work He began way back 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem.

“True or False: I believe I am on a mission from God.” True or False? If you are on this mission, it takes priority over everything else in your life. It's more important than your comfort, safety, position and welfare. This mission from God comes first and demands everything from us. We just sang, “I gladly count my life as loss that I might come to know the glory of Your cross.” I gladly count my life as loss!

Magnetized by the Cross

I want us to hone in on one particular aspect of this mission. We left off in John 12:32 when Jesus said, *“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”* When He talked about being lifted up, He was speaking of His death on the cross.

Lifted up was He to die;
“It is finished!” was His cry;
Now in Heav'n exalted high.
Alleluia, what a Savior!

(Alleluia, What a Savior! By Philip P. Bliss)

The cross is like a divine magnet. As Jesus is lifted up on that cross, He is drawing people to Himself. As we see the unbelievable love, mercy and justice of God displayed on the cross of Christ, needy, sinful people like us are drawn to the Savior. His cross is magnetic. When you take out a magnet and draw objects to that magnet, those objects themselves become magnetic. It's impossible to be drawn to a magnet without becoming magnetic yourself. We said last week that when we've been drawn into the magnetic field of the cross, we become magnets for Jesus. We are saved not just so we can be safe and secure from all alarm but so we can bring others into the safety and security of God's salvation too. God never saves us just from ourselves—He saves us so we will become magnets for Jesus in the world.

There's a **key element** that Jesus hones in on in His prayer—a key element in this magnetic field—that I want us to focus on. Notice the structure of these three verses. The

theme of verse 18 in the middle is mission. We are on a mission from God. Jesus was sent into the world; now He sends us into the world.

Look at verse 17 and then verse 19. What are those two verses about? Sanctification.

- Verse 17 says, *“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”*
- Verse 19 says, *“And for their sake I consecrate [sanctify] myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.”*

We have sanctification, mission and sanctification. Mission is like the middle of the sandwich. Have you ever thought (or thought lately) about the connection between the church's sanctification and the church's mission? Have you ever thought about the connection between your own personal holiness and evangelism?

Jesus was thinking about this connection. That was a priority on Jesus' heart when He was praying. He's thinking about us being sent into the world and He prays that we would be a holy people. That's what concerns our Savior and He dies on the cross to make that a reality—to make us holy. In Jesus' mind, there is a vital connection between our holiness and His mission being carried out through us. In Jesus' mind, there is no mission without sanctification.

Let's take the word “sanctification” and look at what it means. If you look at the Bible you'll see the word sanctification used in two different ways. First, it's often used in the Bible to describe the believer's condition; or it can be a description of objects, not just of people. It means “to be set apart for God—for God's service.” In the temple, when they would take a utensil and use it in the temple, that object would be sanctified—set apart for God to use for His purposes. When God appeared on Mount Zion and gave the law to Moses, that mountain became sanctified—set apart by God to be used for God's purposes.

Christians have been sanctified in that sense. Listen to 1 Corinthians 6:11. Paul says, *“But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”* Christians are people who by God's grace have been set apart—sanctified. We now are to be used wholly for God's purposes. We belong to Him.

First Peter 1:2 says that Christians are elect, chosen *“according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood.”* In this sense, sanctification describes our position in Christ. We are already holy unto God. We've been bought by the blood of Jesus and set apart to be used for God's purposes in this world. You are a saint if you are in Christ. You are holy.

You can look at your brother or sister and say, “Saint Richard,” or “Saint Margaret,” and honor one another as those who have been chosen by Christ and set apart to be used for God’s service. That’s obviously the way Jesus is using the word “sanctify” in verse 19. He has consecrated—sanctified—Himself, has set Himself apart to be used by God for God’s purposes so that we also may be sanctified and live for the same mission and purpose for which Jesus lived.

There’s a second use of the word sanctification that doesn’t refer to our position but to practical reality. This is where God takes what is true of us in Christ. We are saints; we are holy. He changes us so we live it out in our practice. We become increasingly like Jesus in His character and ways. It’s a progressive thing that takes a lifetime but God is committed to finishing the work that He’s begun in us. If you’re in Christ, there’s coming a day when you will see Him as He is and you’re going to be saved to sin no more. “I’m not tempted anymore! I don’t have desires for evil anymore! Not only that, but I absolutely love God with my whole heart, soul, mind and strength! I love holiness and righteousness! And I love people!” That’s what God is doing in our lives—making us holy.

In verse 17, Jesus is praying that God would be continually sanctifying us in His truth for His Word is truth. Look at this while I summarize these three verses.

- In verse 17, Jesus prays for our sanctification.
- In verse 19, He lives and dies to obtain our sanctification.
- The reason this is so important to Jesus is because of verse 18—apart from our sanctification, the mission of God that began in Jesus cannot advance in this world.

God is going to get His mission accomplished with or without us. But in order for us to be involved in that process, we have to be a holy people. We have to be a people who are being sanctified by Him.

Robert Murray M’Cheyne was a great pastor-preacher in the 1800’s in Scotland. He died when he was only 28 or 29 years old but he had an amazing impact for Christ. As he was thinking about his work as a pastor, one of the things he wrote down in his journals and for what he will be remembered for generations is this phrase: “What my people need most is my own personal holiness.” As you think about that phrase, I want us to translate that into the mission God has called us to in this world. Think about this: “What the world needs most is my own personal holiness—our holiness as a people.” That’s what Jesus said is vitally important.

That's not always what we think is so important. We put a lot of energy into plans and programs, strategizing for the evangelization of the world. While we were in Prague, we heard a lecture from a British scholar who was talking about one of the major mission-mobilization movements of the 20th century. It's been 100 years now since that started. In this scholarly lecture, he described the waning impact of that movement and how it did not ultimately succeed in advancing the gospel. He never really said why but as I was thinking about this prayer of Jesus, it dawned on me that I think the movement failed largely because it lost sight of the priority of sanctification in the truth of God's Word. When Jesus thinks about our mission, He doesn't think first and foremost about our programs, strategies or about training us to be good at evangelism. He thinks about us becoming like Him because Jesus understands that if we are like Him in this world—if we are holy as He was holy—people will be drawn to Him through us. It will not fail. A church that is like Christ will be attracting people to Jesus and a Christian who is like Christ in holiness will be advancing the mission of the Gospel.

The world is not so much interested in what we preach; it's first interested in how what we say we believe changes the way we live. What happens if we succeed in getting a lot of people to come to church, but they come and look at our lives and say that our lives contradict what we're preaching? They're not likely to believe it. Jesus wants our lives to adorn the Gospel we preach, so He prays for our holiness and does this because Jesus understands that God only uses sanctified people.

Turn to 2 Timothy 2. I remember reading this as a teenager and when I was a student at Moody, I wrote it out and put it on a wall so I could read it often. It impacted me back then and it still does now. I was thinking about this passage in light of the vital connection between our mission and our sanctification. Let's read starting at 2 Timothy 2:20. *"Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself..."*

Notice that each person needs to have involvement in this process of sanctification. There is a cleansing of yourself that you need to be actively involved in. This doesn't happen by yourself but as a result of what Jesus did on the cross—His blood was shed to cleanse you from your sins. You appropriate that by faith, called cleansing yourself *"from what is dishonorable."* That involves recognizing patterns of sin in your life as you bring your life before the searching gaze of God's Spirit through God's Word. You ask and

respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit and cleanse yourself from what is dishonorable. Paul says, “...if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.”

There is a connection here between mission and holiness. Let me read verse 21 in a different way. Notice the contrast. “Therefore, if anyone [does not cleanse] *himself from what is dishonorable*, he will [not] *be a vessel for honorable use*, [he will not be] *set apart as holy*, [and he will not be] *useful to the master of the house*, [because he will not be] *ready for every good work*.” Our involvement in sanctification by the Spirit in our lives is vital, so Paul says to Timothy in verse 22, “So in light of this, flee youthful passions because what your people need most, Timothy, is personal holiness.” “So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”

I don't think it could be any clearer. Paul is concerned about the same thing Jesus is concerned about. The purity of God's people as we go forth into the world on mission is vital; more important than all our plans and strategies is that we be personally pure. We need God to do a work in us before God can do a work through us.

Go back to John 17. How does Jesus define the relationship—the connection—between our sanctification and our mission in the world? I'm going to give three statements and resist the homiletical urge to expand on all these statements. I don't want to open up a fire hydrant and say, “Drink.” I would rather have this be like a laser beam that penetrates your mind and the Spirit brings down to your heart. You can think about these things as you work on the application of this message.

Sanctification Makes Us Not of the World

First, look at verse 14 of Jesus' prayer. Jesus says, “*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.*” Worldliness is a mindset—an outlook that ignores God and lives independently from Him. It's a way of living that acts as if this world and this life is all that matters. In 1 John 2, we see that worldliness is characterized by three things:

- The lust of the flesh (when bodily appetites are most precious to you); sensuality (physical appetite). Some people live to eat and some give in to drink. For others it's sexuality. The lust of the flesh is when these things are most precious to you.

- The lust of the eyes is when we're captivated by the outward show of things without analyzing the real value—when we live for the glitter, glamour, popularity and esteem of this world.
- The pride of life is the third characteristic of worldliness—when you boast in what you are and in what you have; when you think your birth, family, name, social status, influence, power, wealth or education is what gives you status and meaning. Jesus says, “My people are not of that. Those values are not what are influencing their lives! Those things do not captivate them anymore because those things do not captivate Me.” Jesus says, “I am not of this world.”

When did Jesus ever get captivated by the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes or the pride of life? That's not what moved Jesus. He wasn't moved by the things this world values. When the world looks at the church, they need to see that the things they live for are not what we're living for. We don't value what they value and are not controlled by what they're controlled by. Our finances can go up and down and we're not crushed or lose our joy. We're not prejudiced, angry and hostile to people who are different from us or people we think are wrong. Our hope is not based on what happens in the November 6th election that's not what we're living for.

Sanctification Does Not Take Us Out of the World

Jesus says, “I'm not of the world and My people are not of this world because I died (Galatians 1 says) to rescue them from this present evil age.” The first truth is sanctification makes us not of the world. The second truth is a corollary to that: sanctification does not take us out of the world. We're not of this world but we're not taken out of this world either. Look at verse 15. Jesus prays, *“I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.”*

Jesus says, “I would rather have My people remain in this evil world and be kept from the evil than to be taken out of this world and removed from the presence of evil all together so that My people can display My glory in this world and so My people can be on mission drawing others to Me.” On the one hand, we're not to be attracted by this world, thinking, “This world is so great! It's what I'm living for!” On the other hand, we're not to despise the people of this world or disdain the world. We're not enamored or frightened by it. We're not of the world but we're not taken out of the world.

Sanctification Thrusts Us into the World Yet Takes the World Out of Us

This leads to the third truth that I think captures the heart of how Jesus sees the relationship between holiness and mission. Sanctification thrusts us into the world while taking the world out of us. Holy people, like Jesus, go into the world, embrace the people of this world, love this world—people who are different and are burdened down by sin—because Jesus loved this world. He came not *“into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him”* (John 3:17). But all the while Jesus was in the world, the world never got into Him. It never captivated His heart.

Sanctification thrusts us into the world while taking the love of this world out of us so we can penetrate the world by the beauty and power of the gospel of Jesus without being polluted by it. Tim Keller says this is one of the ways we test ourselves to see if we have gospel holiness or whether we're just Pharisees. The way we test ourselves is by asking, “Am I neither attracted to the world nor afraid and disdainful of it?” A Pharisee would be afraid and disdainful of the world, wanting to stay in a safe hideaway, staying as far away from the world as possible. A Christian is able to go into the world but is not enticed or seduced by the world.

How? By the Word of God and the Work of Christ

How does that happen? How do you live a holy life in this wicked, fallen world? Look at what Jesus prays in verse 17. *“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”* Your Word is truth! God's Word is what builds us up. It immunizes us! I want to close by reading a quote by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones that I think is so enlightening. He says,

"Our main concern should be not so much to limit the power of evil, as to increase the power of godliness within us...The gospel is not primarily concerned to remove the sores of infection, or to put us out of the danger of infection; what the gospel does is build up our resistance to infection to such a point that it renders us immune to it. The church is not concerned with trying to destroy the infection. Until our Lord returns again the infection will be there; until Satan is cast into the lake burning with fire, the infection will continue. You cannot stop it. It will be there..."

The business of the Christian and the church and the gospel is to see that you and I take so much of the pure milk of the Word and the strong meat of the Word that our resistance is built up to such an extent that we can, as it were, stay in a house of infectious disease and be absolutely

immune. The germs are there, yes, but we are filled with these antibodies that destroy them the moment they attack us."

You cannot be sanctified or advance God's mission in this world without saturating yourself in the truth of this Word—filling yourself with the truth of God's Words, building up an immunity so that you can go into the world without letting the world get into you.

We are going to do what Jesus did—pray. We have a mission conference next weekend and Jesus cares a lot about what we're doing. He prayed about this before He went to the cross. He cares about the mission of the church and about our involvement in it. Jesus doesn't just want us to hear these things; He wants us to be actively engaged in these things, going into the world—that's why He died. He set Himself apart so we could be set apart doing the same mission Jesus did. It would be a shame to listen to such a wonderful prayer and not take some time to say, "Amen, Lord. I need You to work in me."

Applications

There are two takeaways from Jesus' High Priestly Prayer. **Without holiness you cannot be on mission.** Ask yourself, "Is there some area of my life right now where I am resisting repentance?" Maybe it's in your marriage. Maybe you've been married a long time and you can't really say that your marriage is reflecting Christ and the church. It looks a little bit more like Archie and Edith—not Christ and the church. The Lord doesn't want your marriage to stay like that.

Maybe it's in your relationships. Jesus goes on to talk about the unity of the church. What hinders us in mission is not that we don't know how to share the gospel but too often we're full of gossip, spite, anger and division. Maybe you need to repent there.

Without holiness you can't be on mission. Don't just think about how your sin is keeping you at a distance from the cross (as bad as that is). If you won't repent, you're missing the glory of the cross. But more than that, if you don't live the lifestyle of repentance, you're missing many opportunities where God wants to use you to penetrate other people's lives for the gospel. Pray about that. "Lord, do You need to work repentance into a specific area in my life?"

The second thing we can pray about from this chapter is **without mission, we cannot grow in holiness.** This is a big part of our spiritual growth as Christians. We get out of ourselves and what's comfortable, going into a lost world and telling other people about

Jesus. If you're feeling stagnant in your spiritual growth, yes, read God's Word and pray, but maybe God is asking you to go to someone else and start reading the Word of God with them, pray with someone else, go and make disciples and get out there in the world to tell people about Jesus. Through doing that, you will grow in Christ-likeness because that's what Jesus was all about. He was the Man Who lived for others.

Pray, "Is there someone in my life right now the Lord wants me to disciple and share Christ with?" Without mission we can't grow in holiness.

Take a few minutes to pray quietly about these two areas; then we'll pray together.

Lord Jesus, thank You that You dedicated Your whole life to the purpose of bringing us to God so we could be cleansed, forgiven of our sins, sanctified and set apart for Your service. Lord Jesus, we thank You that when to Your cross, blazing with holiness, we come with our sins and failures that we are welcomed and embraced with the forgiving mercy and love of God. We are not left the same but are transformed. Lord, I pray that we would forsake all sins and unbelief that are keeping us from growing in holiness; that we would do this not just for our own sake and character but for Your glory and the good of others.

Thank You that You want to use us in others' lives and that you've placed us where we live—in our schools and jobs—so we can be on mission for You. Lord, I pray that You would open our eyes to the harvest all around us and help us be active in laying down our lives for others as You were, Lord. God, we are only jars of clay but we hold a priceless treasure—Your Gospel is priceless! We exist to bring You pleasure, God. We pray that we as a church would bring glory to You through Spirit-transformed lives. Transform us so we might be instruments through which You can transform others. Help us demonstrate the beauty and power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We ask for this, Lord, and we thank You, Jesus, that You prayed for it and died to obtain it. To You alone belongs all the glory. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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