

John Chapter 17 v 6 - 19

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Date: 18 November 2018

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[0 : 0 0] Good evening, everyone. Tonight is going to be slightly different to normal for the reason that today is the International Day of Prayer for persecuted Christians or for the suffering church.

And we started this morning, we looked a little bit about from the Bible where we're encouraged to remember those in prison, those who are intruded, those who are suffering. We thought about how we do that and why we should do that.

And I said this morning that we were going to do something slightly different this evening. So we are going to be singing hymns and we are going to be reading from the Bible and we are going to have some thoughts from the Bible.

But specifically, because this is a day of prayer, what I want us to be able to do is to spend quite a large part of our time this evening in prayer. And so there's going to be around about three sections of the service where we'll spend between five and ten minutes in prayer together.

Some of that can be silent, but for those of us who are able to pray, will be leading us in prayer. We're going to have things that we're learning about by PowerPoint about particularly the country of Nigeria, which is one of the nations in the world where specifically at this time many, many Christians are being killed and wounded and driven from their homes and so on.

[1 : 3 1] We thought a bit about some of them this morning too. So it's going to be slightly different, something that I've done before. I hope that it will work well. I hope that it will be something of a help to us in our praying and also, as we thought this morning, when we think upon those who are suffering for their faith, it makes us appreciate all that God gives us, the freedom we have to worship together.

And so we're going to sing our first hymn, but before we do, I'm going to read very briefly from Revelation and chapter 7, because when we pray for Christians around the world, what we're doing is reminding ourselves that we are united to them, we are brothers and sisters in Christ with them, and that we are all heading to one heavenly home.

And that's the vision that the Apostle John received when he was given the insight into heaven. And here's what he saw. After this, I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.

The Lamb was the Lord Jesus Christ. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice, Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.

All the angels were standing round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying, Amen.

[3 : 0 8] Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen. Amen. And notice there, did you, how the people who are described as being from every nation, every tribe, every people, every language, we will be there with them if we are Christians.

And we shall worship the Lord our God and delight in his presence in heaven forevermore. So our first hymn reminds us of that wonderful day, that wonderful hope that we have and that every Christian has.

That's 186 in our hymn books. Tis the church triumphant singing, worthy the Lamb. The church triumphant means the church that has conquered, the church that has been victorious and is now in heaven with the Lord.

And so 186, let's stand and sing together. So we're going to come to our very first section of prayer.

And what I'd like us to do is to spend our time in thanksgiving. Thanksgiving for all that God has done for us, just as those who have gone before in heaven are worshipping the Lord our God, worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ.

[4 : 35] He's pictured there as a lamb because of, many of you all know, throughout the Old Testament, the lamb was a picture of sacrifice, of one who died in the place and for the sins of the people.

And Jesus is the supreme, the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. And we are called to worship and thank him, to thank him for the freedoms that we have.

And in one sense, in our prayers, we can also be praying for those who are persecuted in general, those who have not these freedoms but share in this salvation. So I'm going to lead that time of prayer very briefly.

And then those who feel able, please pray on our behalf and lead us. If there's times of quiet, don't worry. Bring your own prayers of thanksgiving to the Lord if you feel unable to do so publicly.

And then we'll come back together again. So let us pray. Oh, we thank you and praise you again, our God, that even at this very moment in time, not only around the world, but Lord, even in heaven itself, there are a great multitude, a great number, which we cannot count, who are worshipping and praising you and rejoicing in your salvation and your forgiveness.

[5 : 53] thank you that though we are just a few dozen here we are part of this marvelous wonderful church of Jesus Christ and that we are united with one another by your Holy Spirit by faith in you so that we are brothers and sisters and that we are we are those who are the closest family because oh Lord by your spirit you've made us one people whether we speak different languages have different colored skins or live in different parts of the world and even in heaven itself we thank you that we are one and that because we are united in that worship of the one God the one Savior Jesus Christ help us in this time this evening help us to pray help us to worship and adore you help us oh Lord to commit to you the needs of those who are part of our family for we know that you are the God who hears and answers prayer and we bring our prayers in the name of

Jesus amen it's more 414 414 Jesus where your people meet reminding ourselves again of the incredible blessing we think coming to church at times even as Christians can but not careful become a drudgery but actually the fact that we can meet together is an incredible blessing and privilege again that many other Christians around the world do not have the blessing of and we should count it a very precious thing for 414 let's stand and sing please would you turn with me to uh the gospel of john and chapter 17 the gospel of john and chapter 17 and uh we're going to read part of the prayer of jesus it's three parts to his prayer this is the prayer that uh he prayed on the night before his own death he prayed concerning himself and uh they pray concerning his disciples those who are immediately with him there then he prays for all believers but we're going to look particularly just for a few moments this isn't going to be a a sermon in that sense just a few encouraging or thoughts from jesus prayer for his disciples those immediately with him at that moment so john 17 verse 6 if you have the red church bible it's page page 1085 page 1085 and read verses 6 to 19 i have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world they are yours you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word now they know that everything you've given me comes from you for i gave them for i gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them they knew with certainty that i came from you and they believed that you sent me i pray for them i'm not praying for the world but for those you've given me for they are yours all i have is yours and all you have is mine and glory has come to me through them i will remain in the world no longer but they are still in the world and i'm 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 none has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that scripture would be fulfilled i'm coming to you now but i say these things while i am still in the world so that they may have the full measure of my joy with them i've given them your word and the world has hated them for they are not of the world any more than i am of the world my prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one they are not of the world even as i am not of it sanctify them by the truth your word is truth as you sent me into the world i've sent them into the world for them i sanctify myself that they too may be sanctified just a few thoughts then from this passage we are thinking particularly about ourselves and the importance of prayer the importance

that we pray why do we pray well there are many reasons but one of them of course is because our lord jesus prayed he himself was a man of prayer we don't fully understand all the relationship between the father and the son that they were both by nature god yet we realize that jesus prayed while he was on earth he prayed many times we have that being revealed to us and here we have him praying praying for his disciples those first disciples those uh 12 or so that were with him there at the beginning and jesus begins by talking about the relationship about how these people became his disciples and what it means to be a disciple and so first of all we realize that to be a disciple means that jesus has revealed god to us we're talking about uh the same with the church all over the world whether we're here in england whether those uh christians are in as we'll think later nigeria or thailand or burma or wherever they may be or even those first disciples every single one of us is a christian because god has been made known to us through jesus he's the only one who can make him known he's the only one who can reveal jesus to us god to us and being a christian means a revelation a realization an understanding an insight into who god is and there's a lovely picture there isn't there of the interrelationship between the father and the son they were yours you gave them to me now all people belong to god because he is our creator no matter who we are again whatever color we are whatever language we have we all belong to god but there's this special sense in which the father owns those who are his those who are his people those who will come to faith in his son the lord jesus and this lovely sense in which the father gives us gifts us to jesus we are his love gift and elsewhere in the bible it talks about going the other way jesus gives us to the father there's this wonderful sense of giving and sharing between the father and the son we have been given to jesus given to obey him notice that you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word the the relationship of the christian to god's word comes out all the way through this prayer particularly for the disciples jesus spoke and declared the word of god he didn't come with if we can put it this way some latest newfangled idea some latest theory or philosophy even though the religious leaders thought that his ideas were new and radical actually all he was doing was bringing to them the old testament bringing them bringing to life as it were the real word of god and a christian is somebody who obeys that word and as we see later on in verse 8 accepts god's word christian is not simply who's somebody who has their own ideas about god somebody who just thinks of god in their own particular way and makes god to be in their own likeness but every christian around the world is someone who has heard the word accepted the word and believe the word those two go together really if you accept something as true uh then you act upon it you obey it and god's word to all people in the world is simply that we must believe in his son the lord jesus christ there is no other name says the apostle peter when he's preaching in acts no other name given under

heaven by which men must be saved men and women must be saved the name of jesus is the name and so those christians around the world have come to this same faith in god and revelation of god because they've heard the gospel and that's one of the most wonderful things as well that we recognize how the gospel has gone out throughout the whole world the good news of jesus and men and women who've heard that have accepted that wonderful word and they've obeyed that word and put their faith in jesus for themselves and so being a christian a believer means that we have met with god and that god has spoken to us words that we have accepted and believed but notice there's two things as well that come out here and this particularly again draws our thoughts to those christians around the world first of all there in verse six i've revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world verse nine i pray for them i'm not praying for the world there's a clear distinction between the christian and the non-christian and that's why in one sense when we get to it we'll realize why men and women are persecuted for their faith because christians just do not blend in christians just do not go with the flow christians are not just part of the herd mentality there's a sense in which as a christian there has to be a difference because they've met with god and they've heard the voice of god therefore they radically change people transform people people who are not part of the world not part of the general populace they stand out because as jesus says they are yours now jesus was about to leave his disciples they'd been with him and they'd spent time with him through those years but now they had he was leaving he was going to the cross he was going to his death and resurrection and ultimately to return to the father and so he then says i pray for them jesus prays for we are only joining in with jesus in praying for the persecuted church we're joining in with jesus when we're praying for those who are suffering and in need i'm leaving them verse 11 in one sense but they're going to stay in the world now he's just said they've come out of the world and they're not part of the world and they're saying they're in the world well there's that sense of course in which there's a separation from the world that we are different but we are in the world but not of the world that's the phrase the christian in the world but not of the world the christian lives in this world suffers the same trials and difficulties and struggles that everybody else does but they're not part of the world's thinking not part of the world's understanding of life not part of the world's they don't share the same as the world's purposes and plans and commitments and so what does jesus pray holy father protect them this is two places he's going to pray this but here he says 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 none has been lost except the one doomed to destruction he's talking about judas judas was a false believer somebody who pretended to be part of jesus's disciple group but who ultimately proved to be someone whose heart had not been changed who had not obeyed the word who had not met with the living god so jesus prays holy father protect them by the power of your name

now some translations have the sense keep them faithful by the power of your name it's very much the same thing remember we talked this morning uh about the great prayer of the uh persecuted church for many of them the desire is this that they should be strong in the faith that they shouldn't disown the lord jesus one of the uh girls we're going to mention um in the slides in a few moments but uh many of you will remember in nigeria a large group of school girls were taken in fact two large groups was taken some in 2014 and then some just a year or so ago as well those young girls were on the whole uh a large part of them were returned released after a year or two some several years later one girl particularly was not returned and the reason she was not returned was because she was a christian and she wouldn't deny her faith all those girls were taken usually from christian schools and they were forced to convert to islam but she would not convert to islam she held her peace and said whatever happens to me i will not turn away from christ she was only 15 how on earth could she have such strength such power not because she was simply a stubborn teenager because the lord god was at work in her heart so we need to pray for those who are persecuted that the lord would protect them by keeping them faithful keeping them trusting keeping them going in fight in spite of opposition and so we move on then into the prayer i'm coming to you now verse 13 but i say these things while i'm still in the world jesus has given this prayer for his disciples and us as a cause of joy encouragement to remind us that he prays for us remind us that he is not forgotten us so he's returned to heaven it's not that jesus is no longer concerned for his church for those who suffer in some way that because he's disjoint out of sight and out of mind that's never the case in fact the bible makes it clear that he ever lives in hebrews lives forever to intercede to be working on our behalf he never will be separated from the church that he loves and then we come to i think what is specifically aimed at and of encouragement to those who suffer for their faith i've given them your word and the world has hated them for they are not of the world anymore than i am of the world we know that when our lord jesus came into the world the thing that prompted and stirred men to hate him was because he was radically different from the religious leaders of the day yes others loved him because he healed and he taught and he and he did wonderful miracles but the religious leaders hated him and if they hated him then they will hate those who are like him my prayer is not that you take them out of the world but you protect them from the evil one the christians around the world that are suffering and are persecuted are hated not hated because they're hateful people they're not hated because they take up arms against others they're not hated because they set bombs or traps or because they're deceivers or because they're liars or thieves they are hated only because they have received the word of god and they seek to obey it and live it which makes them different which makes us different as well and jesus's prayer is not that those difficulties and and that those problems may in one sense be resolved notice that my prayer is not that you take them out of the world again we thought of that this morning that for us naturally our

[23 : 03] prayer would be for christians who are suffering persecution lord end the suffering and the persecution now there's nothing wrong with us praying in that way but actually the greatest prayer that we need to pray for these believers is that the lord would protect them and keep them in the midst of their trials in the midst of those struggles and troubles that he would protect them particularly from the evil one behind all the attacks against god's people behind all that is opposed to the good news of jesus christ there is an enemy the devil the evil one paul writes the ephesian christians and he says to them our our battle is not with flesh and blood but with the spiritual forces and dominions and powers of this age and so the final part of jesus prayer is sanctify them by the truth your word is truth what does he mean by that what does he mean by sanctify them that sounds a a very religious word but he helps us to understand understand what it means by what he says afterwards as i as you sent me into the world i've sent them into the world for them i sanctify myself that they too may be truly sanctified so to be sanctified means to be like jesus and jesus came into the world why because he was totally committed to doing the father's will totally committed to the to the purposes and the plans of god to save the lost and so when jesus prays sanctify them his prayer for those disciples then his prayer for the church a prayer therefore for us to pray for struggling and and suffering christians is this is that as they know god's word that they might become more and more committed to the will of god more more shaped to god's will more more given over in their thoughts and their actions to pleasing god and serving him that's exactly what jesus did when he came from heaven into this world when he sanctified himself he set himself apart for one purpose to do the will of god which was to save us and bring us into god's salvation so there are just some thoughts really about that passage about jesus praying for those real believers and for us to pray for them to be protected particularly from sinning against the lord and turning away from him protected from the devil and his lies and his attacks upon them and particularly that they might be sanctified that they might indeed find that god through these things shapes and causes them to become more like jesus and ultimately those prayers are for ourselves as well but we're going to be praying for the church and doing that in a few moments time so we're going to sing once more together and then we're going to come to some slides and a couple of times of prayer 631 is our next hymn 631 through the love of god our savior all will be well doesn't seem like it particularly when we go through suffering too we find ourselves doubting the love of god doubting that all will be well but our faith and the faith of those believers we're praying for is such that we know we can trust god in all things 631 631 oh

Free and change us, the space is made, hope all is well. Precious is the heart that healed us, the light is the grace that sealed us.

Stronger than strengthful to shield us, all must be well. I'm going to just look at a few slides together, particularly, as I said, focusing on Nigeria.

If you don't know where Nigeria is, it's that yellow area there. So this is Africa, North Africa, Mediterranean, the Red Sea. This is Morocco and Algeria up here and Libya, Tunisia, Egypt.

So down here, Western Africa, large country, Nigeria. And so we read there, Islamist militants have escalated their war of terror against Christians in northern and central Nigeria.

[28 : 14] What it is, if you know anything of your geography, basically that part of Africa is largely Muslim. That part of Africa is largely Christian, if we can put it in a general sort of sense of a way.

That's not completely true. But what has happened over the centuries is that, and continues to happen, is that militant Islamists pushing, pushing further south into these countries.

There's Somalia there and Kenya. So in one sense, the country is almost split in half. But the very, very strong Islamic terrorists who are linked with ISA are attacking Christians, particularly in the northern parts of Nigeria.

And there's some terrifying statistics. It's estimated that in the first six months of 2018, 6,000 people were killed, largely, largely Christians.

50,000 displaced as part of a systematic campaign against Christians. So what would happen is that the soldiers would come in, the terrorists would come in. They would drive people out of their villages, kill them if necessary, and take over their land, take over their farms.

[29 : 33] Those 50,000 people have all been pushed south with no home, with no way of supporting themselves. And, of course, many of them have lost loved ones and families.

The prayer that we're asked to pray, the sort of prayers we're asked to pray. Father God, we cry out to you on behalf of your persecuted children in central and northern Nigeria.

Thousands of Christians have been killed, wounded, and driven from their homes. So our prayer is, may you be a strength and shield to those who suffer, bringing healing to the wounded and comfort to those who grieve.

Let your light shine to bring the eternal hope of the gospel, even to the perpetrators of violence. That's one of the amazing things that Jesus taught us, was to pray for those who persecute us.

Not pray that they would be attacked or cursed, but pray that they themselves would be saved and brought to faith in the Lord Jesus. And they asked for prayer for the release partners.

[30 : 33] This is Release International, one of the charities that are working there. And they have many people there that they support and help on the ground to practically help the believers who have been displaced.

So we've got, please pray for the timely provision of emergency aid and shelter, so that their partners can help displaced families. That's the 50,000 people or so, probably more than that.

Wisdom, as our partner conducts trauma healing workshops for victims of violence, as I've already said, about particularly girls, but others as well.

Husbands will be killed, women will be taken and forced to marry Islamist militiamen. And many of them escape eventually, but of course all sorts of terrible trauma has happened to them.

They need help through those anguished times. Strength and protection for our partners as they minister in the name of Jesus. And yes, an end to the conflict that's going on there, after that.

[31 : 37] Father in heaven, we thank you that our Lord Jesus taught us to pray. And encouraged us to pray and gave us an example of prayer.

To pray for those that the world hates and those that need protection. And again, we pray that you would help us to be more prayerful. To be prayerful for those who need your help.

We are so blessed and you give us so much help. And we know you give them help. But Lord, they are in such devastating situations. Help us and guide us as we pray together now. For we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.