

Buzz King
buzz@BuzzKing.com
BuzzKing.com
303 437 7419

The Gospel of John 17:18–19, NIV.

¹⁸As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

Sent United Into the World.

We are all familiar with the two version of the Lord's Prayer, and specifically with the version in the Gospel of Matthew, which is very close to what we all pray. The version from Luke is lesser known, but still it is widely referenced if for no other reason than it being a shorter version of the Matthew prayer. But what isn't widely known is that the Gospel of John, which is not one of the three synoptic Gospels, contains a prayer that is not in any of the synoptic Gospels. It is much longer than the Lord's Prayer and consists of the entire Chapter 17 of John. The prayer in John 17 is often called the *High Priestly Prayer*. The two prayers are quite different. The Lord's Prayer in Matthew is a model prayer that Jesus offered as a way of teaching us how to pray. It is meant to be spoken by us. In the Gospel of Matthew, it is delivered to a large crowd during his long Sermon on the Mount; that crowd included the Apostles. The overall themes are God constantly protecting us from evil and the power of and need for forgiveness on God's part

and on our part. The High Priestly Prayer is not meant to be spoken by us; it is spoken by Jesus directly to God, with the Apostles listening. It isn't a template for how we should pray: rather, it's an "intercessory" prayer asking God to protect us and calling for all believers to be united. It focuses on the glorification of God and our job to actively take on the work of Jesus, as this occurs just before Jesus is executed. The prayer in John 17 contains much more detail. Let's look at this.

This prayer was heavily used in the church in which I was raised. It was considered as important as the Lord's Prayer. As a kid, though, it was too long and too cerebral for me to relate to. But when I was much older, I went back and read it carefully. By then I was deep into my academic career. I was paging through the Gospel of John one evening, and when I got to Chapter 17, I realized that the prayer in this chapter had been taught to me multiple times as a boy. I also realized, as I slowly read the words, that this material had burrowed deep inside me and that it was a vital part of my spiritual identity. I'll get back to this.

The prayer that Jesus offers to God in the chapter before he is arrested and subsequently executed, begins with Jesus looking toward Heaven. Here is the first of three segments. It offers glory to God the Father for a specific reason:

"Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all

those you have given him. ³ Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

Jesus is saying that his earthly mission is completed: he is about to die. Jesus has offered eternal life to all those who have faith in God. Jesus notes that before the universe existed, God the Father and Jesus both existed.

The second of the three segments is the longest. Jesus offers a prayer for his followers, and that includes us. Here is an abridged version. Remember that Jesus is praying to his father for us, not telling us how to pray to God:

⁶ "I have revealed you ^u to those whom you gave me out of the world. I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. ⁹ I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. ¹¹ I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am 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. ¹² 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.

¹³ "I am 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 within them. ¹⁴ I have 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. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

Jesus tells his father that he has passed on the truth that God sent Jesus to deliver. Jesus makes it clear that right now, he is praying not for the unbelievers of the world, not for people who do not accept what he has taught, but

specifically for his followers. Those who have become disciples of Christ now belong to God, not to the world. They are *in* the world, but they are not *of* the world. This means that Jesus is dedicated to seeing that they are protected as they carry on his work after he has been killed. Jesus does remark that one Apostle has traded his soul for money: *"None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled."* Jesus is leaving the Earth in glory. His journey home has already begun, and he wants the joy he feels to be felt by all those who have listened to him and believed. But the world will hate them for their beliefs, and they need to be strong. So, they must be protected from evil. Jesus ends this section by saying that he is commissioning his followers to go out into the world, that Jesus sanctifies them, and that they will spread the Word of God. Notice these very important words: *"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."* This means two things. First, we must be one with God and never break those bonds. And second, we must be united as a Church, as followers of Christ, as evangelists who share what we believe with the world. By standing together, we support each other as we witness to humanity.

In the third and final section of the High Priestly Prayer Jesus opens his supplication to God to include every person who will ever come to believe in him.

This is where we know with certainty that Jesus isn't simply commissioning his Apostles and his other current disciples, but all of us, too. We also see the crux of the difference between the Lord's Prayer in Matthew and the High Priestly Prayer. Jesus is lifting us up, not just as people who must pray to God and be forgiving, but as people who must actively be God's voice in the world. This is abridged:

²⁰ "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—²³ I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

²⁴ "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

²⁵ "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

Jesus asks that the close relationship, the intimacy between Jesus and God the Father serve as the model for the fellowship and mutual support among all believers. Harmony among us is key to us successfully carrying out our mission of bringing the Word to the world. Jesus also calls for all of us to eventually be with him for eternity so that we can share in the glory that God and Jesus have held since before anything existed in the world. Jesus says that God's presence in our lives, the teachings of Jesus, and faith in God are concepts that predate all that

exists and are more fundamental than the physical universe itself. Jesus wants God's love and Christ himself to be alive, to dwell within us. Love flows freely from God through Jesus to us. That is what is important, not the world around us.

There are a few things that stand out in this prayer for us, offered by Jesus Christ. God does promise us eternal life. God, through Jesus, calls for us to be united in support of each other as we go out into a world that does not approve of us, a world where we are to spread the Word and teach others to live by the teachings of Jesus. It is not through any power in this world, nothing that we can see or touch or detect with our senses that gives us purpose and sanctifies us in the eyes of God. Jesus makes it clear that his impending execution, his brutal crucifixion is not a failure. His death is the moment when his glory is revealed and when all generations of believers are commissioned to tell the world about God. Above all else, Jesus repeatedly makes it clear in this prayer that he does deeply love us. Finally, while the main purpose of this prayer isn't to teach us to pray, we do see through this example that we can indeed call upon God for intercession, to protect individuals, to guide them into his kingdom. We can pray like Jesus did.

I have been asked many times, and I mean many, many times why I chose to go into the ministry after a full career as an academic. It will shock you to be told that I did not get ordained so that I could become rich and famous and buy a

huge mansion on the southern Californian coast, one that would be at this moment sliding into the Pacific – in case you haven't read about the shrinking beaches down the entire state of California. I did it because of two things, and they are at the core of the prayer that forms Chapter 17 of the Gospel of John. The motivation was subconscious, but its roots are in the High Priestly Prayer.

The first is that we are sent into this world as representatives of God, to spread the teachings of Jesus. Those teachings include the gift of the Kingdom of God, which offers a life with purpose and joy and forgiveness. This is a kingdom where we can make mistakes and present ourselves to God and be regenerated. Jesus's gospel also includes the promise of an eternal life in the kingdom, the always present love of God, and the spiritual protection of God. Jesus also taught us to love God with all our hearts, minds, and souls, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We now know that we must be righteous in all we do, and avoid anger, vengeance, and hatred. We are to be humble, be peacemakers, love even our enemies. Our forgiveness is to be limitless. We are to serve. We are to value the things of God's world far, far above those of this world. We are to pray to God and to offer those prayers privately, not so that others will think we are holy.

The second reason I went into the ministry relatively late in life is also at the heart of the prayer offered for us by Jesus in the Gospel of John. It has to do

with unity. We are indeed sent into the world to profess, to embody the teachings of Jesus, and to show the joy of living by the Word. But importantly, we are to do it as a unified body. We are a single Church. This is no superficial, surface-level arrangement where we get along with each other and try to be available to each other during times of individual or group anxiety. We have distinct and different skills and gifts, but we offer them together as an integrated whole. As a unified Church, we are far more powerful. This is true of our evangelistic work, of our witnessing. But it's also true of any efforts we make toward community outreach, disaster relief, or making the world a more joyous place for all people. And, it promotes spiritual maturity: unity requires patience, empathy, and understanding each other. In the High Priestly Prayer, Jesus makes it clear that by going into the world with unity, we are able to make others believe that Jesus is the Messiah, that he was sent by God, that God is real, and that we should all live by the ways of Jesus. We do not have to agree on everything. In fact, the thing that makes Christian unity so unique is that it is not based on having identical world views or holding each other to a set of political litmus tests. Rather, our unity is based simply on our shared faith, thus giving us a foundation for getting along, even when we disagree on major earthly issues. Christian unity is thus a path toward global peace. That is what we project when we are one.

Somebody asked me not long ago if I wished I had gone into the ministry earlier, if I had skipped the worldly life of being a professor and dedicated my entire life to representing God in the world. This was a patient at the hospital where I am a chaplain. I am quite used to being asked first how long I have been a chaplain and an ordained pastor, and the answer is about eight years right now, and then why I went to the seminary as an older person. I've gotten these questions at least thirty times, I'm certain. But this was first time I had been asked if I wished I had started in ministry as a young man. I told this woman, who had just had a baby and both she and her child were doing great and she was quite happy, that I became a reverend because I have always believed, since I was a kid, that God wants us all to be his workers on this planet, each in our own way, and because I have always treasured the joy and spiritual power offered by Christian unity. But, I said, I would have been a very poor pastor and chaplain as a young man. It was a matter of maturity, of learning about other people, of traveling, of coming to understand both people younger than me and older than me, of having kids, of gaining all the experience that teaches us how to relate to humanity. I needed all that before I could properly serve. I always learned academic things, like mathematics, engineering, language, even philosophy and the principles of my faith easily. But I was very slow at learning about God's

people. This woman asked me if I had any advice about being a parent, as this was her first child. I asked her if she had any spiritual practices. She said she was raised a Christian, believed very much in God, and although she had wandered from her faith, she and her husband were going to raise their kid in the Church. I told her to make sure her child, and this was a daughter, understood that she was made in the image of God, that this was a great gift and a great responsibility, and that she would always find more purpose in God's kingdom than in the things of this world. This mom thanked me and asked me if I could please bring her a Bible.

Here is what happens immediately after Jesus offers the High Priestly Prayer, which of course was not his name for it. This is Verse 1 of Chapter 18:

18 *When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden, and he and his disciples went into it.*

This scene is the transition from his prayer for all of us to his arrest, trial, and crucifixion. The words "*crossed the Kidron Valley*" draws a parallel with King David when he flees Jerusalem under threat from his son Absalom. This garden mentioned is the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. We are told that Jesus often met there with his Apostles. It was a familiar place that accented their unity and their joint purpose on Earth. As people of faith, we spiritually enter that garden together because we were sent united into this world.