

## John 17:18-23

### Introduction

This morning we pick up rather awkwardly in the middle of the prayer that Jesus prays on behalf of His disciples before He goes to the cross. Next week, before we come to the conclusion of this prayer, we'll go back to the beginning. For right now, we'll just be making backwards references to where we've already been. So we start in verse 18 with these words of Jesus:

**I. John 17:18** — “As You sent Me into the world, I also sent them into the world.”

At first, this might easily seem jarring and out of place in the context of this prayer. Jesus said in verse 9 that He does *not* ask on behalf of the *world*; He prays *only* on behalf of all those whom His Father has given Him. Jesus prays that after He has left the world, and while His disciples are still in the world, the Father would keep and guard the disciples in His holy name so that not one of them would perish in the world (vv. 11-12). Jesus says that the world hates His disciples because they are not of the world even as Jesus is not of the world (vv. 14, 16). If all this is true, then why, when Jesus goes back to the Father, does He leave His disciples *in the world*? Why does Jesus say in verse 15: “I do not ask You to take them out of the world”?

Jesus doesn't pray for the world, as such, but He is praying for those whom the Father has given Him “*out of the world*.”

➤ John 17:6, 9a (cf. vv. 2, 24) — “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world... I ask on their behalf...”

The world is full of God's elect—of those whom the Father has given to His Son—who have not yet been gathered in (cf. 10:14-16; 11:51-52). This is why God *sent* Jesus *into the world* (cf. 3:17; 6:39). And this, in turn, is why Jesus doesn't simply leave us in the world, but actually *sends* us *into* the world — even as He was *sent* (cf. 4:38; 20:21). We're not still here for no reason. What a comfort this should be to us!—Especially in the light of what this world is and has always been. And what an exhortation and conviction this should be to us! We're still here on purpose — to be the instruments through which Jesus is continuing to bring in those whom the Father has given Him, *and* to be the community *into which* they are being brought—the flock *into which* they're being gathered. So Jesus prays in verse nineteen:

**II. John 17:19** — “For their sake I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.”

In chapter ten, it was the Father who “*sanctified* [Jesus] and *sent* [Him] into the world” (10:36). Now Jesus says that *as* the one whom the Father has “*sent*... into the world,” He *sanctifies* Himself. In other words, Jesus *sanctifies* Himself specifically for the accomplishment of that *mission* for which He has been *sent* into the world (cf. Lev. 11:44).

When the emphasis of “sanctify” is positive (being set apart *unto* or *for* something), as it is here, then we can think of the idea of consecration. In the Old Testament, Aaron and his sons were sanctified, or consecrated for their priestly service.

- Exodus 28:37 [LXX; cf. 29:1; 30:30; 40:11; Lev. 8:12] — You will clothe Aaron, your brother, and his sons with him with these things, and you will anoint them, and you will ordain them, and you will sanctify/consecrate them, in order that they may serve as priests to me.

In the book of Deuteronomy, all the firstborn males of cattle and sheep were to be sanctified, or consecrated, to the Lord in order that they might be offered up on the altar.

- Deuteronomy 15:19 [LXX] — All the firstborn that are born in your cattle and in your sheep, you shall sanctify/consecrate the males to the Lord your God.

And now here in John 17 Jesus consecrates Himself for His own priestly work in offering Himself as a sacrifice so that He might bring in the sheep and join them in one flock; so that the children of God might no longer be scattered abroad, but gathered into one (cf. 10:14-16; 11:51-52). Furthermore, Jesus consecrates Himself so that we ourselves might also be consecrated as the instruments of His saving mission in the world. We are the ones through whom Jesus is still bringing in those whom the Father has given Him, *and* we are the community into which these sheep are all being gathered as one. From this we begin to see that the ultimate goal of our mission in the world is oneness — because this was also the goal of our Lord’s mission in the world.

“As You sent Me into the world, I also sent them into the world. For their sake I consecrate Myself, that they themselves also may be consecrated in truth...”

**III. John 17:20** — “I do not ask [these things] on behalf of these [eleven disciples] alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word [as the result of them having been sent into the world];”

It’s important for us to see *who* Jesus is praying for here. He’s praying not for the world, but for *all* those who believe in Him and who will ever believe in Him. He’s praying for *all* the *sheep* (whether they’ve been gathered in yet or not). He’s praying for *all* the *children of God* (whether they’re still scattered abroad in the world or not).

- John 17:11a, 15–17 — “Holy Father, **keep** them in Your name... I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to **keep** them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. **Sanctify** them by the **truth**; Your **word** is **truth**.”

Can you see that what Jesus is praying for is oneness? “Holy Father, keep them [all] in Your name” (v. 11). Do not let them be pressed into the world’s mold, but sustain them all in their true knowledge of You. Keep them all in eternal life by guarding them in the way of holiness. “Sanctify them [all] by the truth; Your word is truth” (v. 17). Keep them all in eternal life and the way of holiness by the revelation of Your name which you have given to Me – by the word of

truth. And what is the sum of all these things? If we add all these things up, it equals oneness. Oneness is not peripheral to redemption; it contains within itself the whole of our redemption. This is why Jesus prayed in verse eleven.

- John 17:11 — “Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, **that they may [always] be one even as We are.**”

And this is why Jesus prays again here: “I do not ask [these things] on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word...”

**IV. John 17:21a** — “...that they may all be [always] one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us,”

What is our oneness? It’s not just our loving one another. Love is something that thrives *in* our oneness. But our oneness is a common eternal life. It’s eternal life shared in common together. It’s a common knowledge of the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent. It’s a relational knowing and trusting in God that’s shared in common together. It’s a common holiness. It’s a fundamentally holy way of life that’s shared in common together. It’s a common commitment to the word of truth. It’s a belief in the living doctrines of the Gospel that’s shared in common together (cf. Eph. 4:4-6). This is our oneness.

Our oneness isn’t an emotion or a feeling. Neither is it an organizational unity. Neither is it simply love. Our oneness sums up all that our salvation is – holiness, Gospel truth, knowing God, eternal life. Jesus expresses this very comprehensible reality in language so wonderful that it far surpasses our ability to comprehend: “that they may all be one; *even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us.*” Love, then, is simply that which flourishes and thrives in the environment of this visible and mystical oneness for which Jesus prays.

Remember, again, these passages from chapters 10 and 11.

- John 10:14–16 — “I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; **and they will become one flock with one shepherd.**”
- John 11:51–52 — Now [Caiaphas] did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but **in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.**

Can you see now why Jesus prays for our oneness?—why this oneness is such a big deal to Jesus? Can you see that in praying for our oneness, what He’s really praying for is all the fullness of redemption itself? The ultimate goal of our being consecrated and sent into the world can be summed up in one word: Oneness. And this is because the goal of Jesus own mission in the world can be summed up in this same word.

Our oneness includes within itself all of these things: walking together in the same way of holiness, believing together the same word of truth, knowing and trusting together the only true God, and so sharing together the same eternal life. And this is a oneness that's always visibly on display before the world. Jesus prays: “[I ask these things] that they may all be one [and so we most certainly *will* be one!]; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us...”

**V. John 17:21b — “...so that the *world* may believe that You sent Me.”**

After all we've just seen, does this really mean that our oneness is just a means to an even greater end? Does Jesus pray that we might always be one only as the means of our evangelistic witness to the world? But how could there possibly be a greater or more ultimate goal than our oneness? Our oneness is not a means to an end, but the ultimate end itself.

Jesus has already been praying for the salvation of the “world” (cf. 3:17) insofar as He's already been praying for *everyone* (for “*all*”) who will ever believe. In this sense, we could say that what Jesus has already been praying for is the oneness of the world — “the world” as a new humanity, a new creation (see sermon notes on John 3:13-17). So if Jesus has already prayed for *everyone* who will *ever* believe *in Him*, and if what He has prayed is that they all will be one, then what can He mean when He says that this oneness of everyone who will ever believe *in Him* will result in *the world* believing *that the Father sent Him*?

Who is this world that will believe? Jesus said:

- John 17:9, 14, 16 — “I do not ask on behalf of the world but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours... I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”

In just a few verses Jesus will pray:

- John 17:25 — “O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me.”

In the context of this prayer, the world is the theater for God's saving work because it's *out of the world* that God calls His sheep (cf. vv. 6, 11, 15, 18; 12:46), but the world *itself* is the confirmed enemy of God (see sermon notes on John 16:8-11). So what can Jesus mean when after praying for all who will ever believe in Him, that they may *all* be one, He then goes on to pray, “so that the world may believe that you sent Me”?

There are three places in John where people are said to “believe” in Jesus in the sense of believing that He was the Messiah, but not in the sense of having a true saving faith (2:23-25; 8:30-31; 12:42-43). Here in verse 21, Jesus says, “that the world may *believe* that You sent Me.” In verse 23, Jesus will say, “that the world may *know* that You sent Me.” *Believing* and *knowing* are used synonymously. In chapter eight, Jesus said to the unbelieving Jews:

- John 8:28 — “When you lift up the Son of Man, then **you will know [then you will believe]** that I am He, and I do nothing from Myself, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.”

This knowing (or believing) clearly isn’t of a saving quality. Jesus said to His disciples in chapter fourteen:

- John 14:30–31 — “I will not speak much more with you, for **the ruler of the world is coming**, and he has nothing in Me; but **so that the world may know** that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me [the world *will most certainly* come to know that I love the Father *because* I do exactly as the Father commanded Me; see sermon notes on John 3:17].”

Once again, this knowing (or believing) is not of a saving quality—though it could perhaps *lead* to saving faith (cf. 14:16-17; 15:18-19). Jesus said in chapter thirteen:

- John 13:34–35 — “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this **all men will know [or, believe] that you are My disciples**, if you have love for one another.”

Once again, this knowing (or believing) clearly isn’t of a saving quality, though again, it may perhaps lead to a saving faith. Jesus said to the Jews in chapter ten:

- John 10:36–38 (cf. 14:10-11) — “...do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? If I do not do the works of My Father, **do not believe Me** [do not be convinced that I am telling you the truth]; but if I do them, **though you do not believe Me, believe the works [be convinced by the evidence]**, so that you may *know* and continue *knowing* [so that you may believe and continue believing] that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.”

Once again, this knowing and believing doesn’t appear to be in and of itself of a saving quality. Jesus is exhorting the Jews who are accusing Him of blasphemy to believe the evidence of their own eyes and to be convinced of certain redemptive facts with the ultimate goal that they might come to believe with a saving faith. Here in chapter seventeen, when Jesus prays, “[I ask these things] that they may *all* be one [all who will ever believe in Me]; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may [all] be in Us, *so that the world may believe that You sent Me,*” is Jesus speaking of *the world* having saving faith? Or is He speaking of *the world* being compelled to acknowledge or be convinced of certain redemptive facts?

“Believe,” here, is in the subjunctive mood (the mood of potentiality; cf. Jn. 1:7; 4:48; 6:30; 8:24; 9:36; 11:15, 40, 42; 13:19; 14:29; 19:35; 20:31; 9x’s elsewhere in the NT). Now, if it was an *aorist* subjunctive then the emphasis would be on a point in time (punctiliar) action: “that the world may *come to believe* [at a point in time] that You sent Me.” This *might* or *might not* indicate “coming to believe” with a saving faith (in 3:17 and 12:47 the aorist subjunctive is clearly used for a saving faith [“that the world might come to be saved through Him”]). But this isn’t an aorist subjunctive; it’s a *present* subjunctive, which indicates not a point in time action

but continuous or ongoing action: “that the world may always be believing [at all times] that You sent Me” (cf. Jn. 6:29; 10:26, 36-38; Mk. 11:23). This (in addition to everything else we’ve seen) indicates that Jesus is not speaking here of a saving faith (cf. Michaels, Ridderbos, Calvin). In what sense could it be possible for *the world* to be *always believing (at all times) with a saving faith* that the Father sent Jesus? The point, here, is rather that whenever and wherever the world is confronted with the *oneness* of Jesus’ disciples, it will always be compelled to believe and to know—even in its hostility to Jesus—that, in fact, Jesus has been sent by God.

Can you see now how this only reveals further the true redemptive glory of our oneness? Our oneness is eternal life shared together. It’s a relational knowing and trusting in God that’s shared together. It’s a fundamentally holy way of life that’s shared together. It’s a commitment to the word of truth that’s shared together. This *is* our oneness. It’s a oneness that’s visibly on display before the world. And so this *oneness* of *all* those whom the Father has given to Jesus is the vindication of Jesus and the triumph of His saving work even in the eyes of a world that remains hostile to Him. In this we see the true glory of our being one! And so Jesus continues in verses 22-23:

**VI. John 17:22–23** — “The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected as one, **so that the world may always be knowing [at all times (present subjunctive)]** that You sent Me, and loved *them* [cf. Rev. 3:9], even as You have loved Me.”

What is the ultimate mark of God’s saving, redeeming love for us? It’s our oneness. Here, then, is not only the vindication of Jesus, but even our own vindication in the eyes of a world that remains hostile to us. The world that hates us (v. 14) is forced by our oneness to know that *God* has loved us. In this we see the true glory of our being one! So then, let us always be pursuing with the utmost zeal our common holiness, our common commitment to the word of truth, and our common knowledge of the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent—our common eternal life. And let us remember that it’s for the sake of this oneness that we’ve been consecrated and sent into this world – so that all the children of God might be gathered into one. As the Apostle Paul exhorts us:

- **Philippians 1:27–28** — Only live your lives in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ [a common holiness], so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear about your circumstances, that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one soul contending together for the faith of the gospel [a common commitment to the word of truth], in no way alarmed by your opponents—which [oneness] is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God.