

Daily Devotions Saturday 27th June

John 17 1-5

The whole of chapter 17 is a prayer. Jesus prays first for himself then the disciples and finally all future believers.

He starts with, 'the hour has come' and if we read that together with verse 4, it's as if the whole 3 year mission had been planned in heaven before Christ was born and was now reaching its culmination. Everything he had come to earth to do had been done except one thing. His death!

The fact that Jesus turns to prayer in this 'final hour' is an encouragement to us. Jesus came from glory where he had continual fellowship with the Father and the Spirit. He was God in flesh and yet he prays to his Father. He was one with God even while on earth so why pray?

Communications between the 3 persons of the trinity are evident in scripture and for Jesus it never occurred to him not to pray. Fellowship with his Father was maintained through the spoken word all through his ministry. I'm pretty sure Jesus, the Father and the Spirit can communicate in ways other than words but the human Jesus chose words for our benefit.

It is often a battle for us to pray to an invisible God who can feel distant from this world and deaf to our prayers but if it was important to Jesus, then it is even more important for us. Prayer is crucial. It is how we too have fellowship with God.

Jesus's prayer is about him asking the Father to glorify him. Something I doubt we would ever pray. More about this on Monday!

Publicly we find it easier to pray for others than self! As good Christians we want to be more concerned about others and appear less concerned with self. Here, Jesus sets us another example. It is not wrong to pray about ourselves! I'm sure we all do privately but look at the content of this prayer. It is all about glorifying God and fulfilling his purposes.

God may know our thoughts before we verbalise them (Psalm 139 1-4) but like any Father he still delights to hear his children speaking to him. That delight will be greater still if our prayers about ourselves are about his will being done in our lives rather how many more self centred blessings we can squeeze out of our ever generous Father.

Daily devotions Monday 29th June

John 17 1-5

This at first seems like a self centred prayer. In effect Jesus says glorify me!

Look closer. His two reasons are significant. He wants to be glorified so that the Father will be glorified (v1) and secondly that people will have eternal life (v2).

Totally unselfish motives really!

We know now that this request was to do with the cross. Many cannot understand how God was glorified in such a brutal death. Some think of it as cosmic child abuse!! But it was a supreme act of love that defies our understanding. God in his perfect wisdom was bringing together a sinful people and a holy God. Millions of people will live for eternity because of this event at Calvary.

The prayer Jesus prayed was answered. The cross, if studied properly, speaks volumes of the glory of God, his wisdom, his love and his justice. Christ's suffering and ultimately his death was turning point in history that the majority of God's created people don't acknowledge let alone believe. The way to heaven now lays open!

God's glory is most often thought about in terms of his magnificence in heaven. Radiant light, peace, cherubs and angels worshipping, rainbows, crystal seas and ever widening rivers. But Jesus says that this is where the real glory lies. Himself on the cross to bring eternal life to millions.

As it is with Christ going to the cross, so it is with us that God can and will use suffering to glorify his name. He has been doing it throughout history. We mustn't long for comfort, security or a pain free life. Whatever our circumstances we must glorify God and magnify his name.

'If anyone would come after me he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me"
(Mat 16 v 24)

Daily Devotions Tuesday 30th June

John 17 6-19 (esp 11,15)

Jesus is about to leave earth so his prayer for those he leaves behind is particularly significant. The 11 apostles are men he has grown to know and love over the past 3 years. They have become like family but also people who will carry on his legacy.

He has two prayer requests for these men. The first is that God would protect them from Satan. He knows they will die because they will be preaching the gospel but he doesn't pray for their comfort, happiness or security. The world and Satan is their enemy and Jesus asks God to protect them while they remain in the world. In effect Jesus is saying, 'Whatever happens to their bodies, guard their souls'. God honoured this prayer. They remained faithful unto death.

I've found this a real rebuke to my trivial prayers for my boys and those who I love who are close to me. We live in comfortable circumstances in our middle class existences and still we find ourselves praying for our children's happiness and success!

What would our prayer be for our loved ones as we approach our own deaths? Peace, happiness and security? Or would we be like Jesus and be concerned more about their souls?

We read yesterday that God's glory doesn't come cheaply. It usually involves pain, suffering and sacrifice. Maybe we should allow the Holy Spirit to challenge how we pray for those we love who are outside of Christ.

'Perhaps we should pray harder prayers for our children. Perhaps we should pray for the kind of tough life that will bring them greatness of character. Perhaps we should pray that their self confidence is dented so they learn to lean on God more and find in him their strength and portion even if that means that some of their hopes and dreams, and ours, come crashing down.'

(Ann Benton. Parenting against the Tide.)

Daily Devotions Wednesday 1st July

John 17 6-19 (esp 17,19)

Jesus's first request was that God would protect the apostles from Satan's attacks. While on earth, Jesus accomplished this apart from Judas who Satan entered in order that scripture would be fulfilled. (v12) I've always felt this to be harsh on Judas but also know I have to bow to God's infinite wisdom.

The second request is that God would sanctify them. We usually think of sanctification as a process of being transformed into the likeness of Christ. I'm sure Jesus wanted this for the apostles as much as he does for us but in verse 19 he says, 'I sanctify myself'. Christ cannot be transformed into the likeness of himself so what does he mean? The Greek word used is, 'hagiazō' which means either set apart for sacred use or made holy.

Christ was clearly setting himself apart for sacred use by going to the cross. It was by his example that the apostles would see their own need to be dedicated to the same sacred purpose (v19). Jesus asks God to make this happen.

Importantly, sanctification was to come from the truth (v17). Jesus says that God's word is the truth. Pontius Pilate famously ask Jesus, 'What is truth?' (John 18v38) What a question! So many have asked the same question throughout history. Jesus didn't give Pilate an answer. Maybe he sensed it was more of a sad reflection than a serious and searching question.

But, we have the answer! Here it is in verse 17. 'Your word is truth'. We need look no further. Astrology, mediums, meditation, etc, etc have nothing to offer compared to the truth of God's word.

How much do we as Christians see ourselves as set apart for sacred use?

'Purpose is the engine, the power that drives our lives'. (John Noe)

If we are serious about our sacred purpose to glorify God, become like Christ and to pass on the good news of Christ then we will soak ourselves in a right understanding to the truth of God's word!

Daily Devotions Thursday 2nd July

John 17 vs 20-26 (esp 20-23)

The final prayer from Jesus is for all people who will believe the message preached by the apostles. The over-riding desire is that God would grant unity to all believers.

At this point in history there were only Jews and Gentiles. There were no Catholics, Protestants, Anglicans, Methodists, Calvinists, Pentecostals etc etc. You'd forgive Jesus for feeling frustrated at the seeming lack of unity that has developed.

Did God not grant Jesus's request?

He did! There is the body of Christ! Those who have believed the message of the apostles. (v20). The message is the words recorded by them for us in scripture. The details of Christ's life and teaching are the truth through which we have unity. Man made pollution of what Christianity is about, has distracted us from the unity that Christ wanted. We need not let the past or the present discourage us. We can still be as one with those who hold fast to the glory of Jesus as revealed through scripture.

There still can be personal disagreements and differences even amongst the body of Christ. You know what I mean!! But we as part of God's church have been made one family by the Holy Spirit. Humbly reading God's word together will help us to stay united in mind and heart.

We may only really have superficial relationships with each other but Jesus asks his Father to allow us to have a communion with each other in the same way that they do. 'Just as you are in me and I am in you'. (v21)

Twice Jesus mentions the ultimate reason for this unity. It is that the message gets passed on. We need to be so, 'In Christ', that the world will believe the Father sent him. (v21) And he is to be so, 'in us', that the world will know how much God loves the world. (v23)

Unity with each other, unity with God and unity with God's word is the means by which Jesus sees the message being passed on.

Let's meditate on Philippians 2 vs 1-5 and ask God how we can contribute to the unity of our church.

Daily Devotions Friday 3rd July

John 17 vs 24-26

We come to Jesus's final prayer recorded by John. His next prayer was to re-confirm his commitment to God's will when, in anguish, he sweat blood at the thought of what was to come. Then finally he prayed from the cross, 'My God why have you forsaken me'. The end of Jesus's mission was lonely, as will ours be, but Jesus reflects on the important end points of his mission.

There is a complete sermon in verse 24 alone! Before the world was created, let alone you and me, Jesus was loved by the Father. That glory was evident in Jesus wherever he was. He doesn't just ask the Father that we should be with him wherever he is. He says, 'I want'. The original translation is, 'I will it'. I'm sure this could mean that we should share his glory in heaven but Jesus uses the present tense! He wants us with him now!

We think of Jesus seated at the right hand of God, but as part of God, he is also omnipresent. Doesn't he say, 'I am with you always'? (Mat 28 v 20)

When Jesus spoke these words he was talking about future believers. How amazing that the will of Jesus is that, we believers, are with him now. It may be in a conversation with a friend, a kindness shown to someone, a Bible study, a service, a mission or a prayer. He is with us!!

This sense of continual communion with him is re-iterated in verse 26. As our lives progress, we know that Jesus continues to make God known to us and the purpose is that the love that God shows to Jesus will also be in us!

What a powerful witness to a world that doesn't know Jesus, is this kind of love. We just need to let it show.

'When I have learnt to love God better than my earthly dearest, I shall love my earthly dearest better than I do now.' (C.S.Lewis)

More on this love from James and Grandad on Sunday!!

Daily Devotions Saturday 4th July

John 17 v 24, John 14 vs 1-4

My Mum's birthday, American Independence Day and the day when pubs, restaurants, B&B's, and campsites can re-open! How are you feeling about the future?

To round off these studies in John I want to connect the end with the beginning. We saw yesterday that Jesus wills it that we will be with him where he is. (17 v 24) Back in chapter 14 where we started he said the same thing in v3.

Jesus was in the company of troubled disciples. In his infinite tenderness he gives them a twofold remedy for their worries.

The first is as if he says to them, 'Take another dose of faith'. Twice Jesus says trust. Trust in God and trust in me. (v1) The King James version says, 'Believe in God, believe in me.' The meaning for all us troubled disciples is the same. Here is the creator of everything, the controller of everything and the master of history telling us to rely on his love, his wisdom and his plan for our lives.

For the second remedy he fills our minds with thoughts of future joy. He tells us about his Father's house where he will eventually take us. Jesus doesn't say he will send an angel, he says he will come in person (v3). If we die he will meet us and take us home. If we live on to the second coming the same is true!

With Christ the future is always bright but we must trust in the paths he has laid out before us. Paths that will lead to us inheriting and ruling the earth alongside the King of Kings.

You have probably heard the story of the Atlanta drugstore where an existing tonic developed by a man called John Pemberton was mixed with carbonated water instead of plain water. At the time the drink contained extracts from coca leaves and African Kola nuts. The result was Coca Cola. Among the people who came to be a vendor of the drink was a business man called B.N.Thomas. He tasted it and thought the drink had potential while Asa Candler didn't think there was any future for it in bottles. He sold the bottling rights to Thomas for 1 dollar.

He gave away a multimillion dollar industry because he couldn't see the future.

How much of what God has for us do we fail to realise because our vision is so limited?!