

OUR TRINITARIAN BLESSINGS: What the Father, the Spirit, and the Son Do on Our Behalf (John 17:11-20)

I have some friends in Waukomis, and every time I ask them how they are doing, they answer, “I’m blessed.” That’s a good answer.

In 1958, Jerry Lee Lewis released a song entitled, “Whole Lotta Shakin’ Going On.” One year later, in 1959, a Bible teacher named Herbert Lockyer published a book entitled, *All the Prayers of the Bible*. He claimed there are more than 650 separate and distinct prayers in Scripture. It is quite clear that in the Bible, there’s a whole lot of prayin’ going on.

Of those 650-plus prayers, we are going to look at what I believe is the greatest prayer in all the Bible. This prayer is found in John 17.

The late Warren Wiersbe, a well-known preacher and author, also believed that Jesus’ prayer in John 17 is the greatest prayer; he gave for four reasons why that is so:

- 1) It is the greatest because of who prayed it—Jesus;
- 2) It is the greatest because of what occasioned it—Jesus was about to die for all those who belong to Him;
- 3) It is the greatest prayer because of its petitions—Jesus prayed for Himself, His disciples, and finally the Church; and
- 4) It is the greatest prayer because of the victory it gives—victory over a deceived world, victory over a dangerous word, victory over a defiled world, and victory over a divided world.

I have a question. Let’s suppose you were walking into this sanctuary or another worship center after the service had already started. As you walk in, you realize that someone is praying publicly. What do you do? Some might stand still and bow their heads. Some might get quiet, and walk gingerly to their seat and sit down. The point is that whatever your attitude was at the time you entered would change to one of reverence once you realized what was taking place.

As we begin this message, I want you to know, Someone is praying, and that Someone is Jesus. Our goal is to listen closely and reverently to what He prays.

There are many verses in the NT that describe Jesus’ prayer life. He prayed often. He routinely slipped away from the crowds so He could be alone with His Father. He would get up early in the morning, while it was still dark and pour out His heart to God. Before He named His 12 disciples, He spent all night in prayer. On this night He prayed in the hearing of His disciples, and then He went to the Garden of Gethsemane and prayed some more.

Jesus’ position in prayer changed. Sometimes He prayed with His eyes looking heavenward. Sometimes He knelt. Sometimes He lay with His face to the ground. He did all three that night.

While the NT says much about Jesus’ prayer life, it gives us very few actual prayers

that He prayed.

- We know the model prayer Jesus gave to His disciples.
- We know the one-sentence prayers Jesus prayed on the cross: “Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing . . . My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me? . . . Into Your hands I commit My spirit.”
- We know the prayer Jesus prayed prior to raising Lazarus. It, too, was a bit short: “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”
- We know that in the Garden, Jesus prayed, “Not My will, but Yours be done.”

The longest prayer we have from the lips of Jesus is this prayer in John 17. Truly, this qualifies to be known as the Lord’s Prayer, not the “Our Father who art in heaven . . .” prayer. That is the model prayer. This is the Lord’s prayer.

Let me take a moment to show you how this prayer shows us what Jesus is doing for us now in heaven. To do that, let me take you back to the OT. In Exodus 28 God tells Moses about garments that are to be made for Aaron the High Priest. He is to have an ephod made for him (a vest worn across the breast). Look at 28:6-7. There are two stones that are to be carried on the shoulders, one stone on each (Ex. 28:9-12).

On only one day out of the year, the Priest would enter what was called the Holy of Holies or the Most Holy Place. The presence of God resided there. In that small tent, and later in the temple was where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. The golden lid of that ark was called the Mercy Seat. It was seen as the throne of God on earth. The High Priest, wearing his ephod and the stones bearing the names of the tribes of Israel, would enter that Most Holy Place. He would sprinkle blood on the Mercy Seat making atonement for the sins of the people, and then He would pray to God for them.

According to the NT letter we call Hebrews, Jesus was both our High Priest and the sacrifice. Heaven is the real Holy of Holies. Following His death on the cross where His blood was shed, Jesus entered that Holy of Holies. With His blood He made atonement for our sin. Now, Jesus intercedes for us. The author of Hebrews wrote, “He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (7:25).

As Paul writes in Romans 8:34, “Christ is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”

What Jesus is doing for us now, Jesus did on the night He was arrested. Like the High Priest did symbolically, Jesus did in a very, more real sense. He put us on His shoulders and took us to the Father in prayer. Even now, God is shouldering you to the Father.

We could spend weeks here in John 17. Maybe someday we will do that, but this is not that time. Last week we were in John 16. Today, we will have just a short time in John 17, and next week we will go to John 18. Today, I want to highlight a few verses and emphasize something Jesus brings out. In this chapter, each person of the Trinity is mentioned—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Prayer itself, is a trinitarian affair. We pray to the Father. He is the One we focus upon as we praise Him for who He is, as we thank Him for what He has done, as we confess to Him our sin and misdeeds. And He is the One of whom we ask His help, guidance, and blessings, both for ourselves and others.

While we pray to the Father, we pray through the Son. He is the mediator. He is the One who gives us access to God. We can approach the Father because we are in Jesus. Jesus is righteous, and in Jesus we are righteous. Jesus is pleasing to the Father, and in Jesus we are pleasing to the Father. Jesus has full and complete access to His Father, and in Jesus we have unhindered access to God.

We pray to the Father, through the Son, and by the Spirit. The Spirit gives us the words to say. He shows us our need and leads us to pray to God for those needs. He knows what God wants and leads us to pray for God wants so that God will gladly answer those requests.

Prayer is a trinitarian enterprise. We pray to the Father, through the Son, and by the Spirit. We will also see in this chapter that there are certain blessings God will bring to us, and those blessing are trinitarian. Each member of the Trinity actively brings about those blessings on our behalf.

Blessing #1: The Father Secures Us.

Look at vv. 11-12. Here, Jesus is praying for His twelve disciples, but we can also claim this request for ourselves. That word *keep* means to *protect* or to *guard* or to *watch*. It is used 31 times in the NT. We came across this word earlier in our study of John. It shows up in John 12:25 where Jesus says, “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” Our Lord is teaching, “If you want to protect your life eternally, then you must hate your life now in this present world.” That sounds rather harsh. What does He mean by *hate* your life?

When we love something, we want to hold on to it, caress it, clutch it close to ourselves. It might be our baby, our spouse, our money, our possessions.

Did you ever watch or read *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. There was a character named Gollum. Gollum was his nickname. His real name had been Smeagol. He had been an ordinary Hobbit like all the other Hobbits. One day a relative found a lost ring in a river bed. Smeagol became entranced with the ring. He had to have it. He killed his relative in order to get it for himself. Over time, the evil influence of that ring twisted both his body and his mind. He no longer even resembled what he once was. Do you remember what he called the ring. He called it, “My precious.”

When we love something, we hold on to it. To hate something then, is to release it, to let it go. Jesus is teaching, “It is only when you let go of your life, when you release it to Me, that you can secure your life though all eternity.”

Going back to our text in John 17, Jesus testifies in v. 12, “I kept them . . . I guarded them.” Now, Jesus is leaving them; so, He appeals to His Father and asks, “You keep them. You guard them. You take care of them.”

He asks specifically, “Keep them in Your name.” What does that mean? Four times in

this prayer, Jesus refers to God's name. To speak of one's name is to speak of His character. Look at v. 6. Jesus showed God's people the character of God. He showed them what God is like. He says that again in v. 26. So, in v. 11, Jesus is asking God to protect and guard the followers of Jesus because in His nature, God is loving, and kind, and gracious. "God, because of who You are, guard them," Jesus is asking.

Do you think God cares enough to answer His Son's request? Or did God wave hand and say, "Naw, they're on their own"?

Did you ever see the movie *The Blind Side*? It tells the story of Michael Oher. He was a big, black young man who lived in Memphis. He was often homeless. Sean and Leigh Anne Touhy, a wealthy couple took him in and eventually adopted him. They put him in a Christian school with their own kids. He played on the football team where he became a standout. He played for Ole Miss in college and then became a starter in the NFL. He played left guard and left tackle.

The movie gets its name from the fact that for a right-handed quarterback, his left side is his blind side. He can have a career-ending injury from a hit he never saw coming. You can ask Joe Theisman about that.

In the movie Leigh Anne Touhy says these words:

Now, y'all would guess that more often than not, the highest paid player on an NFL team is the quarterback. And you'd be right. But what you probably don't know is that more often than not, the second highest paid player is . . . a left tackle. Because, as every housewife knows, the first check you write is for the mortgage, but the second is for the insurance. The left tackle's job is to protect the quarterback from what he can't see coming. To protect his blind side.

God protects your blind side, but He also guards you on every side. He guards you from the threats you don't see coming and from those that you just choose to ignore. Now, if you simply disregard some threats, you may get hit, and you may get injured, but it won't be a salvation-ending injury.

I think God allows us to injure ourselves as a result of our own stupidity and willful rebellion so that we learn from our bad judgment. Haven't you ever done something stupid, paid the price, and said to yourself, "Well, I won't do that again"? We all have.

That doesn't mean God wasn't looking out for you. No, it just means that sometimes God allows us to learn lessons the hard way. God is there, however, to keep you from killing yourself—literally, figuratively, and also spiritually. He keeps you. He does so because He is being consistent with His nature and also because He is answering a prayer request that His Son made.

Blessing number one is that the Father secures us.

Blessing #2: The Spirit Sanctifies Us.

Look at vv. 14-15. Jesus carries reiterates and carries forward His request that His Father would protect the disciples. The world was not their friend, nor is it ours. The evil one is the devil, Satan. He is definitely our enemy. Satan is at war with God, and you can

be sure, he doesn't fight by the rules. He doesn't observe the guidelines set forth by the Geneva Convention. He targets civilians. He wants to hurt those whom God loves; so, he aims his arsenal at women, children, and youth as well as those who are actively serving in the army of God.

In addition to securing us, Jesus has another request. Look at v. 17. What does the word *sanctify* mean? I've researched this word at length. I have come to believe that the word has a double meaning. First, it means *set apart*. That is how it is used most often in the OT and often in the NT.

I have used before the illustration of your toothbrush. Your toothbrush may be the most sanctified object you own. Your toothbrush is set aside to one person—you. No one else uses your toothbrush. Your toothbrush is not the family's tooth-brush. It is not like the silverware in the kitchen drawer. No one pulls out a fork and hears another member of the family yell, "Stop. That's my fork."

My family rarely hears me yell unless I'm watching a football game that is not going my way. But you can be sure, if I saw someone using my toothbrush, I would yell.

Your toothbrush is set aside for one person—you. It is also set aside for one purpose—brushing your teeth. You may use a toothbrush to clean bathroom tile, but you don't use your toothbrush. Your toothbrush is dedicated to one person and to one purpose. That is one meaning of sanctification.

When God saved you, He sanctified you. He set you aside to Himself and to His service. It was a one-time, completed act. God has exclusive rights to you. You were sanctified.

Sanctification has an additional meaning.

I attend a men's Bible study on Tuesday mornings.

Recently, we had a debate about the meaning of the word *sanctification*. I wrote a position paper on sanctification, and the paper was emailed to the men who attend the Bible study.

In the paper I quoted several scholars who argue that while sanctification is often presented as a one-time act, there is a second meaning because there are definitely other times where sanctification is portrayed as a process.

One of the men I quoted is the one I referenced earlier—Warren Wiersbe. He once wrote an entire book on just one chapter from the Bible. The single chapter he chose to write a book on was John 17. When he gets to John 17:17, he deals with the meaning of sanctification. He draws a distinction between what he calls *positional* sanctification and *practical* sanctification. As believers, we have the position of being in Christ. Because we are in Christ, God set us apart for Himself and His service. He sanctified us.

Wiersbe wrote that there is a second kind of sanctification. He calls it practical sanctification, and this kind calls for a process. He wrote:

Believers *have been sanctified* once and for all in Jesus Christ; but they are also *being sanctified* as they obey the Word, walk in the Spirit, and serve Christ in the world. Separation from sin ought to result in growth in personal holiness.

The Spirit of God is fashioning you into the image of Jesus. He is causing you to look

more and more like Him every day. He uses the trials and difficulties you encounter to shave off the rough edges of your character. He uses the law of cause and effect to help you see that disobedience brings pain and obedience brings blessing. There is another tool the Spirit uses, and that special tool is mentioned in our text. Look again at v. 17.

The Spirit uses God's word in our sanctification process. As you carefully and prayerfully read the word of God, the Spirit of God beautifies your character. We don't read the Bible just because we are supposed to and because we feel guilty if we don't. No. We read the word of God because the Spirit uses that discipline to change us, mold us, shape us into who God wants us to be.

As we read God's word, sometimes it becomes a mirror, and we see ourselves. We don't always like what we see, and we learn that we need to change. Other times, the Bible acts as a window through which we see God at work, and we are mesmerized by what we see. We see His beauty, His power, His wisdom. This is not a dry, ancient book. It is living, and it is as timely as tomorrow's newspaper.

What water is to a garden, the word of God is to your soul. If I quit watering the flower boxes on the south side of the sanctuary, and if it quit raining, it wouldn't take terribly long for those flowers to dry up, to turn brown, and to lose their beauty. That is what happens to the souls of those who ignore the word of God. They dry up. They shrivel on the inside. You show me a Christian who is sour, pessimistic, critical, and caustic, and I will show you a Christian who long ago quit reading the word of God. Ah, but you show me a believer who is sweet, kind, caring, thoughtful, as well as bold, courageous, and strong in her faith, and I will show you a follower of Christ who gives great attention to the Bible.

Don't read the Bible because you are supposed to and because it is your duty; read the Bible because you want to and because it is your desire.

One of the greatest psalms is Psalm 1. Listen to the first three verses:

1 Blessed is the man
 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
 nor stands in the way of sinners,
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and on his law he meditates day and night.
3 He is like a tree
 planted by streams of water
 that yields its fruit in its season,
 and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.

Let's seek to be that blessed man who delights in God's word. The Spirit of God will use the object of our delight to grow us in holiness and in the image of Christ. That is sanctification, and it is a great blessing. It blesses you and those around you.

So far, we have seen the Father secures us, and the Spirit sanctifies us. Now we come to . . .

Blessing #3: The Lord Jesus Sends Us.

Look at John 17:18-19. Jesus does for us what the Father did for Him. The Father sent Jesus, and now Jesus sends us. These words were spoken to God before Jesus went to the cross. Look at what Jesus said to the disciples after He died and after He arose. Look at John 20:21. John records, “Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you.’”

Just as God was the Sender, and Jesus was the Sent, now, Jesus is the Sender, and we are the Sent. Being sent implies that we have a message to bear. What is that message? We might answer that question in a number of ways. Fifty days after this meeting with Jesus, Peter stood up and delivered a message. We read in Acts 2:36 a portion of that message, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Two verses later he added, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Paul touched on the idea of us having a message to proclaim. Let me read to you the words of Paul in 2 Cor. 5:17-21. Paul says we have a ministry and a message to go with that ministry, and it is all about reconciliation. We live in a world that is unreconciled, a world that is alienated and estranged from God. We have the privilege of bringing the two together as we proclaim the message we have been given. We must remember, however, that we are not the true mediator that brings a lost world and a holy God together. Our job is to tell the world about the Mediator.

We read in 1 Timothy 2:6a, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ who gave Himself as a ransom for all.”

We learn from Jesus’ pray in John 17 that we are blessed by each member of the Trinity.

The Father has blessed us by securing us.

The Spirit has and is blessing us by sanctifying us.

Jesus has blessed us by sending us.

Whenever anyone asks you how you are doing, you can say, “I’m blessed.”