

RELIGION

Scripture of the Week

John 3:16

The Lord's High-Priestly Prayer: Joy and Victory in Jesus!

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The Bible text for next week's Sunday School lesson is John 17:1-11, 20-21. We hope all our readers will take advantage of the Sunday School classes offered in churches throughout our community. Sunday School isn't just for children!

Last week we took a careful look at the traditional "Lord's Prayer" from Matthew 6, and saw that it was a model for all our prayers today. This week's lesson is drawn from the great intercessory prayer of our Lord, which fills all of John 17. In a real sense this is the Lord's Prayer, his own expression of love for his heavenly Father, and his concerns for his disciples.

He spoke these words on the night he was betrayed into the hands of the Jewish priests. Jesus and his disciples had shared the Last Supper together in the Upper Room at Mark's house (as I suppose), and had left that place (John 14:31). Following this prayer they descended into the Cedron (Kidron) Valley (18:1) and after the prayer they went back up the eastern side into the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:26, 32). Mr. Westcott, in his commentary, makes the plausible suggestion that the Lord continued his discourse with the disciples (John 15 and 16), and this prayer, in the very courtyard of the Temple, which overlooks the Kidron

Valley.

And so Jesus prayed this prayer at the climax of his earthly ministry. For three years he had prepared himself for the cross, and for three years he had prepared the twelve to continue his work and spread the good news of his kingdom and salvation. Though he repeatedly had asserted that his "hour" had not yet come (2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20), on this day he could finally say "the hour has come" (17:1; also 12:23, 27; 13:1). Let there be no mistake: Jesus Christ came into the world with one objective, to die on the cross for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2).

As we read this chapter, we are being invited to "eavesdrop" on the personal prayer life of our Lord Jesus. I'm quite sure that the Apostle heard this prayer on that solemn occasion, and that the Spirit recalled it to his mind as he wrote this Gospel. Repeatedly we can read about Jesus' prayers, but only little bits of the prayers themselves are usually recorded (for example, Matt. 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 3:21, 5:16; 11:1). As a human being, Jesus needed to communicate with the Father in prayer, and he sets us the perfect example of prayer -- and Spirit-filled living.

This sometimes puzzles skeptics and believers alike, for it seems to be a case of "God talking to himself." And yet the clear claim of the Gospels is that

Jesus is truly, fully God, one with the Father. Nowhere is the essential truth of the Trinity more clearly proclaimed than in this prayer. The Father and the Son (Jesus Christ) are one (John 17:3, 10-11, 21-23), and the Son is eternal in his glory (17:5, 24), and yet they are separate persons, able to glorify one another (17:1), love one another (17:24), and give one another the care of the disciples. Jesus' divinity does not negate his need to communicate with God the Father; it actually proves the importance of his prayers, and their unlimited power.

This particular prayer is sometimes called the Lord's High-Priestly Prayer, and for good reason. In the Old Testament worship, the most solemn occasion for God's people was the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur; fully described in Leviticus 16, and again, Hebrews 9:1-10). The High Priest of the Israelites would first offer a sacrifice for himself, and then a sacrifice for all the nation. Then he would enter into the Holy of Holies, the heart of the Tabernacle (later the Temple), where the very presence of Yahweh (the Lord) was revealed. Only the High Priest could enter this most sacred room, and only on the Day of Atonement.

In the same way, the Lord Jesus was preparing himself to offer the supreme sacrifice for sins, his own life's blood. His prayer to the Father empha-

sizes his own finished work, on the cross, and his concern that his disciples would be blessed with eternal life (John 17:3) through this sacrifice. Hebrews tells us that Christ, following his death, brought his own blood into the Holy of Holies in heaven, having obtained eternal redemption (Heb. 9:11-12).

With all this as background, we can ready the prayer itself with respectful awe. Its outline is clear: first, he prays concerning himself and the Father (17:1-5); second, concerning his immediate disciples (17:6-19); and third, concerning his entire Church throughout this age (17:20-26). Our lesson text includes only part of the latter two sections, but it should all be read together.

Even though this prayer was spoken in the dead of night, only hours before the agony of the crucifixion, the tone is filled with joy, confidence, and victory. Jesus was close enough now to the cross to see his work as finished (17:4; cp. 19:30). The Father had given him the power, though the cross, to give eternal life to all his disciples (17:2-3). And he looked ahead to his resurrection and ascension into heaven, where he would resume that rightful glory he had surrendered when he took on human flesh (17:5; Phil 2:6-7).

He repeatedly emphasized the God-centered nature of redemption; seven times the Lord said the believers were

given to him by the Father (17:2, 6[twice], 9, 11, 12, 24). Mr. Scofield's notes say it well: "Jesus Christ is God's love-gift to the world, and believers are the Father's love-gift to Jesus Christ." I believe this gives us a marvelous security, not based on our imperfect ability to do all that God requires, but based instead on the Father's faithfulness to his Son.

Never let Satan tear up your heart, saying you aren't good enough for Christ's salvation, or that you have sinned too much since you came to Christ. Your salvation depends only on the Father's promise, and your position in Christ. If you have trusted in Christ Jesus alone for your salvation, then you may be assured that you are one of these whom the Father has given to Jesus Christ, and that you have eternal life.

Another repeated emphasis in our Lord's prayer is that his disciples are taken out of the world, that evil world system which opposes the Kingdom of God at every turn (1 John 2:15-17). Sometimes in this prayer, "world" refers to the earth, or the whole human race (John 17:5, 15). But more often, the Lord prayed for the safe-keeping of the disciples who would remain in the midst of the world system (17:6, 9, 11, 14-16, 18) and that even more would be saved out of the world through the word these disciples would spread (17:21, 25).

It is important for us today to see

that the Lord prayed for the disciples to be "sanctified" by God's truth, revealed in his Word (17:17-19). To be "sanctified" is to be set apart, made holy, or righteous. Jesus prayed that the Father would set apart his disciples, and keep them from "the evil one," Satan (17:15). We can know that we are in Christ, if we can sense the divine working of the Father (through the Holy Spirit), "setting us apart" from evil desires and deeds, and leading us into a holy life.

Frankly, if I see someone who claims to be a Christian, but doesn't have any sign of being "set apart" from an evil lifestyle, I doubt he/she is a true believer. The Father alone knows the heart, so I may be mistaken; but the Scriptures do tell me that the children of God are "obviously" different from the world (1 John 3:10, NIV). Most importantly, I wouldn't want anyone to fool themselves, thinking they can profess Christ as Savior and still live like the devil.

It's a real encouragement to me, to know that Jesus had me in mind--and all of us believers, some 1,950 years later--even as he prepared for the agony of the cross. He knew all my failures, yet he loved me. He knew my weakness, so he prayed for my strength. He knew my frailty, so he prayed that I might be one with him. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

REVIVAL

Our Guest Preacher



Rev. Henry M. Williamson
Pastor, Carter Temple C.M.E. Church
Chicago, Illinois
National President, Operation PUSH
at
Allen Temple C.M.E. Church
4236 N.E. 8th Avenue
Portland, Oregon

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Currie has a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from Portland State University. She is also a Licensed Tax Consultant and Enrolled Agent.

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Evening Worship

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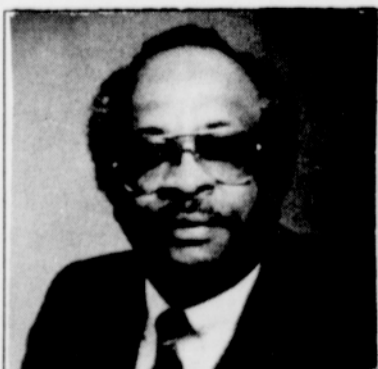
9:30

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6:00

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**Theme: Whatever you're going to do
for the Lord, do it now**

I Peter 4:11

Jesus Loves You! Allen Temple CME Church

Psalm 34:3

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Phillip S. Nelson Pastor

Jesus Christ Is Salvation Union Avenue Baptist Church

5029 N. E. MLK Jr. Blvd.

Portland, OR 97211

Telephone Number - 287-8344

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