

JESUS PRAYS FOR US
John 17:1-11
Sermon preached by Dr. Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
Sunday, June 1, 2014

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives." (John 14:27)

This one verse is just a fragment of Jesus' long talk with his disciples in the Upper Room that night before his arrest and crucifixion. As I said last week this talk was Jesus' last chance to give them his final instructions and encouragement to carry on his ministry through their discipleship. You might even say this was Jesus' last Will and Testament, telling them about their inheritance, what he was leaving them to continue his life's work as well as the promise of eternal life.

After Jesus finished talking he **"looked up to heaven"** and started praying. After his long talk with his disciples Jesus would have a long talk with his Father about his disciples, not only those with him that night, but all of his disciples throughout the ages. So this prayer is about you and me, Jesus lifting us all up to God so we can be empowered to live the full, abundant life. **"And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you sent."** (John 17:3)

What is eternal life? That phrase needs clarification before we can really understand what Jesus wants to give us.

Eternal life is much more than something that never ends, and it doesn't begin at death when you go to heaven to live forever and ever. Amen. Instead, eternal life begins when **"you know God through Jesus Christ."** The key word here is **"know,"** so the question is, do you **"know"** God through his son Jesus Christ?

A lot of people know about God, but that's not the same as knowing God. You may know all the stories in the gospels, you may be able to name all the books of the Bible, in order and you may have a better than average understanding of the doctrines or the teachings of the Christian faith. In fact you might be a regular church goer, agree with the Christian ethic and live a moral life. But none of this gets you eternal life if you don't **"know"** God and his son Jesus.

In the Bible, the word **"know"** is used to describe the intimate relationship between spouses, for instance Adam **"knew"** Eve and Abraham **"knew"** Sarah. So when Jesus prays that you and I **"know"** God he really means that you have a deep, personal relationship with God. Remember, the Christian faith isn't just about keeping the Ten Commandments and being a good person. Ultimately the Christian life is all about the quality of your relationships.

So how do you go about developing this deep, intimate relationship with God? Let's review.

I. Immerse Yourself in God's Word. You can't know God completely if you don't know the scriptures. God speaks through the Bible, especially when you pray and meditate on the scriptures. That's why you're always encouraged to read your Bible every day. Talk to me about getting you a good devotional book or a website that has a daily reading and prayer so you can immerse yourself in God's Word.

II. Immerse Yourself in Christian Community. There are no Lone Rangers in the Kingdom of God. You get to know God by getting to know God's people and I'm not talking about being casual acquaintances. I'm talking about getting to know your brothers and sisters in Christ by forging intimate, personal relationships in which you become more comfortable about making yourself vulnerable, letting some people you've come to know and trust see you with you mask off and become transparent and authentic with those you trust. That's why asking God to bring to you the right friends is so important so you can begin to build solid Christian friendships.

III. Immerse Yourself in Discipleship. Don't be content to be a pew sitter. Don't just come to church and receive ministry. Rise up from your pew and give ministry by giving yourself away. This means your life becomes all about being a Christ-like presence, giving away your spiritual gifts and natural talents to glorify God. Yes, God still loves if you don't, but he can be disappointed if you keep passing up opportunities to serve him by serving your neighbor.

So, do you have a plan, your own personal mission or vision statement out of which will flow through you an effective, ongoing ministry that only you can do because there is no one else like you? Remember you are unique, and God created you for your own unique purpose.

So, Immerse Yourself in God's Word, Immerse Yourself in Christian Community and Immerse Yourself in Discipleship all this helps you know God and eternal life.

Before I go on I need to say something else. Yes, you are called to discipleship and you were created to be ready and willing to give yourself away on command but as you already know, this is not an easy lifestyle. Sometimes you get yourself in big trouble for following Jesus' example. Even so, with all these heavy responsibilities, there are benefits, and you don't have to wait until you die before you receive them.

Now these benefits aren't necessarily material. God never promised your faithful commitment will win you the lottery. Sometimes God's most faithful disciples lose everything, even their lives and yet they were blessed with invisible, intangible benefits that stand the test of eternity.

Here's the first: God gives you an identity. You are God's beloved child and by God's grace you know who you are. You might be thinking well of course I know who I am. Really? Do you realize there are people in this world who don't know who they are but in their more honest moments they'd confess, **"I haven't the slightest idea who I'm supposed to be?"** Many of these people try to make their own identity by becoming who they think they should be. "If I drive the

right car or live in the best neighborhood and wear the right clothes and have the right career then I'll have my self-identity nailed down tight." Really? I don't have to tell you there are too many people in this world who have it all, but have nothing.

On the other hand, when you're Christian, the more you get to know God the more you get to know yourself as one of God's precious creations, beautiful and wonderful in God's eyes. The more you know God, the more you experience his affirmation. When you know God you know the healing power of forgiveness and grace. You don't have to hate yourself for your past wrongs. You can claim God's grace and full acceptance of who you are today, along with the promise of who you can be tomorrow. What's more, the more you know God, the more comfortable you become in your own skin. You can finally accept yourself, even start liking yourself, so you can start being yourself. You don't have to pretend any more because if God loves you just the way you are, who are you to wish you were someone else? You don't have to hide behind a mask, now you can be the real you, and enjoy yourself.

Second. You are given a quality of life you can't get on your own. God through Jesus blesses you with his peace. Remember? "**Peace I leave you, my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.**" (John 14:27) Maybe your life doesn't turn out the way you dreamed it would and yes, you're going to be disappointed, but your disappointment can still be overwhelmed with a sense of affirmation. Your life isn't over, no matter how bad things get, no matter how old you are. There's redemption and grace healing the broken places of your life, piecing things back together so you can still make a tangible contribution and leave a sacred legacy of love to the people you love the most.

Third, you have a friendship with Jesus. Jesus not only shows you how to live the abundant life he empowers you. Remember the Pharaoh's command to the Hebrew slaves, "**Make the same number of bricks and gather your own straw.**" Jesus doesn't dump the impossible demand on you, "**Live the perfect, and by the way it's every man for himself.**" Christ rises up within you giving you everything you need, along with his grace, sufficient for the day.

And finally, God gives you protection. Jesus also prayed, "**I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.**" (John 17:15) I like the Good News translation of this same verse, "**...I ask you to keep them safe...**"

In C.S. Lewis' "**The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe,**" which is a metaphor on Jesus' life, crucifixion and resurrection, four children Peter, Lucy, Edmund and Susan, who have stumbled into the Kingdom of Narnia. There Mr. Beaver tells them about Aslan, a great lion, the Christ-figure in the story. They ask Mr. Beaver, "**Is he safe?**" The beaver answers, "**Safe? Good heavens no, he isn't safe, but he's good.**"

When Jesus prayed, "**I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them (keep them safe) from the evil one,**" Jesus never asked God to hermetically seal us off from the troubles of the world. Quite the opposite, sometimes we find ourselves in

dangerous situations to protect the helpless ones who need God's help. Again this is the essence of discipleship, going into places you'd never dream of going, yet knowing God goes with you to keep you safe from the evil one as you fight the good fight for Christ and his Kingdom, a fight that in the end, God wins

I hope you take some time this week to read John 14-17 to get the full flavor of his last talk to his disciples and his prayer to his heavenly Father, keeping in mind that his words are especially to you and he was praying for you.

God wants you to have a quality life along with the servant lifestyle. The two are a powerful combination that will bless you and people through you.

Take Jesus' words to heart. Make his prayer your prayer and then go out into the world and live deliberately and boldly for Christ and his Kingdom.

Let us pray!