

A Prayer of Protection

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[0 : 0 0] And we'll dismiss our kids to children's ministry. We're in John 17 today, and it gives me an opportunity to mention something I've been meaning to mention.

! I try to mention this every few years. You know, I think, right, that there are no chapters and verses in the original manuscripts. This is a—sometimes I want to make sure people know that, because it kind of matters in various moments, especially how we read God's Word.

But also, I think knowing that is a really good way of thinking through the dynamic that exists between the perfect Word of God and church tradition. Every time you read your Bible, you're sort of in that particular dynamic.

The Word, perfectly given by God, is what you're reading. You're reading it translated by faithful men in the past, who also, in addition to translating it, gave you numbers so that you can sort through the particular text.

So there's a really good kind of illustration if you think about how the dynamic between sola scriptura and church tradition works. Well, every time you read your Bible, you're kind of experiencing that.

[1 : 1 9] There's the perfection of God's Word, and there's the division of God's Word that is not perfect, but is generally helpful. And so when you're reading God's Word, you kind of have to remember, oh, well, these verses weren't like this exactly whenever they were written.

So you have to be kind of mindful of that and sort of evaluate whether those verse and chapter divisions serve the text or don't serve the text. That's kind of how we interact with church tradition. We are grateful for it. It is generally helpful. We are generally inclined to trust it, but we do need to keep it in a second category so that we're able to discern the difference between God's perfect and holy will and his perfect and holy word and what has happened as a result of thousands of years of people, for the most part, trying to be helpful and explaining God's Word.

I have the occasion to bring that up because in this particular section of Scripture, it kind of comes into play. Like this whole idea of chapter 16 and chapter 17, that's useful for a lot of other reasons, including Scripture memory and making theological cases and saying, well, look at this verse or that verse.

But sometimes it can mess with our capacity to understand what's going on in a particular passage. I have no doubt that you've heard many sermons over the years on John 17.

[2 : 4 4] This is a glorious passage. But I wonder how many of those sermons were firmly rooted in John 16. And the reason that I wonder that, or I think it's important, is because if you look at John 17, verse 1, it says, when Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, and then we have the prayer of Jesus.

Well, that tells us that John wants us to be thoughtful about what Jesus had said previously and use that to sort of understand what Jesus is doing in his prayer.

So what did Jesus say previously? Well, if you'll look at John 16, verse 31, Jesus answered them, Do you now believe?

Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace.

In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world. So the high priestly prayer, we see Jesus praying in John 17, which I would argue is a prayer of protection above all else, is rooted in this thing we see in 16, namely, in this world you will have trouble.

[4 : 1 0] And there's an added nuance there, something we've all experienced. In this world you will have trouble. You might be seeing me limp for a few weeks. I have this arthritic condition that just arises, you know, every couple of years, and it attacks a particular joint or a couple joints, and I just

have trouble until it passes.

And so every once in a while this just happens. Now, is there something that I have done to cause this? Potentially. When I went to the Philippines, I ate garbage, like sugar, noodles, so forth. And if any of you know me, you know, like, one of the ways I've managed this whole thing that I've had since childhood is I eat a very strict diet. So it's possible that I'm just suffering the consequences of my own noodle eating down the road.

It's possible. I bring that up to say this. In this world you will have trouble. It's the main idea, what Jesus is saying at the end of 16 there, some of which you will cause for yourself, which can be the worst kind of trouble because you identify too late, like, man, like, this is a self-inflicted wound. I hate those. I don't like any wounds. I definitely don't like the self-inflicted kind. So that's the context of Jesus's high priestly prayer in John 17. In this world you will have trouble, some of which will be self-inflicted, but I want you to take heart.

[5 : 38] I want you to have joy and peace because I have overcome the world. Note also, before we get into the exposition of 17, note also that this is a weird prayer in the sense of how we think of prayer.

Jesus doesn't go away from them after saying that to them. He tells them, in this world you'll have trouble, some of which you will cause yourself. You're going to wander away from me is the first one. He doesn't go away and pray for them.

It actually, the text actually says, after he said these things, he lifted his eyes to heaven. It's not closing his eyes, not bowing his head. He lifts his eyes to heaven and he prays the following prayer. What should we pull from that particular detail? Just this, that Jesus is modeling for us the basic response we are to have to the reality of tribulation and difficulty.

We lift our eyes to heaven and we pray. And Jesus is showing us very transparently. He loves us. He sees this trouble coming and he does what he does. He intercedes for us.

[6 : 38] So that's going to be kind of the dynamic as we work through this chapter is we're going to kind of use 16 in the way that I think it was intended to be used to frame and understand 17.

And you could break this down, I think just generally, with the following statement. There's good news and there's bad news for the Christian. The good news is you, if you have placed your faith in Jesus, you are experiencing eternal life right now.

If you've placed your faith in Jesus, you are experiencing eternal life right now. Look at John 17, 1. When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come.

Glorify your son that the son may glorify you. Since you have given him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

And this is eternal life. That they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent. So this means if you believe in Jesus, your faith is placed in Jesus, then you are right now experiencing eternal life.

[7 : 53] That's the good news. The problem is, is that's not all you're experiencing. The good news, you're experiencing eternal life. The bad news, that's not all you're experiencing.

Go back to John 16, 31. You will leave me. You will be scattered, each to his own home, and leave me alone. In this world, you will have tribulation.

Good news, you are experiencing eternal life. The bad news, that's not all you're experiencing. You're also experiencing various tastes of sin, and death, and struggle as you live in this world.

And Gibbs said this, in the bruised reed, the life of a Christian is a mingled yarn, good and ill together. Our comforts here are mixed with crosses, our hopes with fears, our joys with sorrows. So that's really where we need to sit as we think through John 17. Why is it that God is allowing us to live in this experience where we simultaneously experience eternal life, but also go through various kinds of tribulations, including those that are self-inflicted.

[9 : 10] Look at John 17, verse 6. Jesus is still praying, and he says, I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me.

They have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they received them, and have come to know in truth that I came from you, and they have believed that you have sent me.

Let's get this part straight. They are going to struggle, but those struggles are not signs that they are not saved. That's not the conversation in this passage, and it's not the conversation you should

have, first and foremost, when you struggle.

Jesus is acknowledging that they will go through tribulation, some of which are self-inflicted, but that that is not counting against the reality of their faith.

Think of it this way. There is a gap in our lives between our position in Christ and our performance as Christians. That's just going to be the way it is.

[10:21] Jesus saved us knowing this would be the case. There's a gap between our position in Christ and our performance as Christians. Christians, I think another way to say it is, Christians will endure, but not with ease, not with graceful ease.

Every Christian will have ups and downs in their faith and in their faithfulness. And when Jesus says this to them, he then prays.

Why does he pray after acknowledging the reality of this gap, this performance gap? Well, he prays for them because that's what's going to keep them safe. Jeremiah Burroughs, another Puritan, said, Though the saints may fall into sin, yet they shall never fall from grace, for Christ's intercession is their anchor.

Christ's intercession is their anchor. Think of John 16, 31 through 33 for a minute. Jesus foresees your struggles, right?

He says, you're going to desert me and he could just as easily say a thing about you and the same about me, right? You're going to leave me. You're not going to be faithful. You're not going to be perfectly faithful.

[11:36] What does he do immediately after saying that? He aims for their peace. He aims for their peace. I mean, think of this.

Jesus is so far ahead of us that not only does he foresee our sin, but he has in view our restoration from that sin and is already working toward that eventuality.

So he knows you and he knows that in this world you'll have tribulations and some of them will be self-inflicted, that your faith will go up and down, and he accepts that. He understands that.

And not only has he accepted that and understood that, he's made a plan for that. His plan for you is that in spite of that sin, you would be restored and have a great deal of peace.

It's a crazy dynamic. He's saying, you're going to abandon me, but not only am I not going to abandon you, I'm really concerned for you. And I want you to be blessed and I want you to grow and I want you to be established.

[12:37] So he immediately intercedes for them. Psalm 103, friends, Psalm 103, verse 10 through 14. If you want to understand what the basic dynamic of being a human under the gaze of God looks like, Psalm 103, verse 10.

He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him.

As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

For he knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust. By the way, you could look at this text and get the same stuff I'm talking about here. This person fears God. They also sin.

You see that? He doesn't treat them according to the way their sins deserve. Not because they are just a terrible... He recognizes that it is one thing to be a saint.

[13:47] It is another thing to be a struggle-free saint. And that category doesn't exist. So that's the second thing to start thinking about. Why has Jesus decided to let us live this world, this life, where two things are happening?

We're experiencing eternal life. We're also experiencing plenty of evidence that we are sinners and that the world is broken and so forth. Here's how I think it feels to be a Christian a lot of the time.

There's a sense in which it feels like being that flag in the middle of a tug-of-war rope. You know, that flag that indicates the position.

And on one side is the world, the flesh, and the devil. And on the other side is Jesus. And what's confusing about that experience is we know by faith that that's not an even contest.

It's not an even contest. It's not as if the world, the flesh, and the devil are like a legitimate match for the sovereign king.

[15:01] Why then does it feel like there is a match taking place? Why does it feel like we do a lot, like we're the flag and there's a lot of this activity happening?

Why did God allow that to be the case? Why is that a good and wise plan? Well, that's coming through in this prayer. His purposes for the various struggles and setbacks we'll experience, not only because of our own sin, but because of the sin of others.

That's coming through. See, the interesting thing is, is one day you're going to experience this your whole life. If you're a young Christian, this is the way. Galatians 5 and 6, Romans 7, the spirit and the flesh don't agree.

They wage war on one another to keep you from doing the things you want to do. Paul exclaims at the end of Romans 7, who will save me from this body of death? This is going to be your experience. There's going to be this back and forth between faithfulness and faithlessness.

And the question is, why does that have to happen? Because let's understand something very clearly. It's not because Jesus is actually evenly matched with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

[16:22] In fact, one day, I really encourage you to meditate on this occasionally. One day, quite effortlessly, Jesus will jerk his end of the rope, and you will immediately be completely free.

Sin and death will lose its grip on you entirely, and you'll be completely free. That moment is death. That's what death is for the Christian. Jesus yanks on his end of the rope, ends the illusion of the contest, and delivers you into his presence where there is fullness of joy.

And the contest will be obvious to you at that time to have never really been a contest. And you'll just be free, and there won't be this back and forth. So why are we experiencing that now?

Well, in short, one of the reasons we're experiencing this tug-of-war kind of thing now is because Jesus gets glory by his protective power.

[17:35] Jesus gets glory through his protective power. Look back at 17, verse 1. The main theme of this passage, the starting place for Jesus in his prayer, is his own glory and the glory of God.

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you since you have given him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

And this is eternal life that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom I have sent, I glorified you on earth having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

How is Jesus glorified? The rest of the prayer provides the answer. I don't think we understand how much Jesus is proud of and self-identifies with his protective abilities.

When he is most self-consciously boasting about who he is and what he does, he routinely pushes to the forefront his ability to keep his sheep.

[18:52] This is actually the central subject of praise in the Psalms. The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run into it and are saved.

Blessed are all those who take refuge in him. Jesus is very clear in John 10 that of all the things that he is glad he is, he is really glad that he is the good shepherd who lays down his life for his flock. Jesus is most self-consciously aware of his protective role. In fact, on Palm Sunday, when Jesus sees that Jerusalem will reject him, he weeps over the city and listen to what he weeps for that he is not able to do for them.

Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it. How often would I have gathered your children as a hen gathers her brood under her wings?

But you were not willing. Jesus is a very self-conscious protector. It's a central thing for him and it's a central means by which he gets his glory.

[20:05] Over and over again in the scriptures, you see this. Jesus actually says in our text, I took care of those you gave me. That's one of the things he says, I've glorified you, God, by taking care of the ones you gave me.

Look at verse 9 of 17. I am praying for them. I'm not praying for the world, but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All are mine. All mine are yours and yours are mine and I am glorified in them.

I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world and I am coming to you, Holy Father. Keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction that the scripture might be fulfilled. Jesus is very self-consciously proud of his protective power because it is one of the main means by which he gets glory, which brings us to this thing he mentions at the end of that section.

[21 : 07] What's going on with Judas? You know, we've got one question we're working on, which is, why does God let us struggle in this life? Why is there the back and forth? And the second question is like, what's going on with Judas?

He keeps appearing. What's the deal with Judas? Well, Judas' purpose in the story is twofold. One, he acts as the agent that accelerates the crucifixion.

Like he's the, he's the linchpin that leads to the crucifixion of Jesus. So God's got him set aside to be served in that purpose. But more thematically, Judas exists in the story to tell you what would happen to you if Jesus took his protective hand off of you.

That's the literary purpose of Judas. This is where you would be if Jesus took his hand off you, if he stopped protecting you.

And you could see this, by the way, when Jesus speaks to Peter and he says, Peter, Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. And what's the only thing that keeps Peter in?

[22 : 10] But I have prayed for you. Right? So the literary purpose, if you will, the literary theological purpose of Judas is that's how dependent you are right now on Jesus' protective care.

If he took his protection off of you, you would wander away into the most despicable state possible. Another Puritan, William Perkins, says, without Christ's continual preservation, we would all perish as Judas did.

Our standing is not in ourselves, but in his mighty hand. John Flavel, the loss of Judas shows the power of sin when grace withdraws.

But where Christ keeps his own, no power can pluck them away. So Judas exists to show this powerful protection of Jesus, how central it is to all of us.

And we're starting to get a sense of why does God allow us to live in this kind of tug of war that is almost kind of an illusion. Why does he allow us to experience the struggles that we experience, some of which are self-inflicted, and partly because Jesus gets glory by being our protector.

[23 : 24] And there's a second reason that we see in the text. Not only does Jesus get glory by being our protector, but Jesus gets glory by somehow improving us as he protects us.

This is kind of wild. Jesus gets glory by somehow improving us even as he protects us. I know many of us watch the TV show alone, and they need to double their efforts.

I'm running out of episodes. I've run out of episodes. We need three alone locations all shooting at the same time. And if you're not familiar with the show, it's rooted in just this idea of who can survive the longest in the wilderness.

And there's this one kind of person who you always know is out before they even know they're out. And it's usually because they say this phrase. There's a phrase that's like, there's certain things you see.

It's like, okay, that person's going to be out by the third episode. And this is one of them. There'll be a certain type of person who comes to this barren, desolate place with nothing and has so much confidence they start saying this.

[24 : 26] We're not just surviving. We're sur-thriving. Yes. Yes. And you know, chump, that person will be out three episodes in when they're not sur-thriving.

It's just only true of Jesus that that particular thing is only true of Jesus where not only does he take care of us in really difficult situations, but his care actually makes us better.

Jesus is saying, hey, you guys are going to have a lot of trouble. I'm going to pray for you. And that's not only going to result in you enduring, not only in surviving, but also in sur-thriving.

In John 13, he says, I'm praying all this that these folks, these disciples may have my joy fulfilled in them. He prays for their sanctification in verses 16 through 19.

He prays for their unification in verse 20. So here's the crazy thing about trials. In addition to glorifying God and his keeping power, trials actually serve as God's butlers to deliver his blessings into our hearts.

[25 : 42] And just three of those blessings are mentioned in this text. See, when you go through difficulty, you're forced to figure out the difference between happiness and joy. And there's really only one way to do that.

You have to go through the tug-of-war season to figure out that difference. When you go through a season of difficulty, a lot of the idols and sins and things that are actually making your suffering much worse get exposed.

So there's sanctification. You get joy, you get sanctification. And a third benefit that Jesus prays through here is that one of the other incredible things about going through hardship is you figure out who your friends are.

And there's a deep unity that forms around difficulty. So this is pretty amazing. Not only does Jesus see that your performance as a Christian is going to be significantly less than your position in Christ, he sees that you will endure but not with ease, and he's got it all figured out.

Now, the only reason he's letting you go through this is on the one hand to give himself glory. He takes great pride in his protective power, but also into delivering you, to giving you certain glory, to improving you, to giving you joy, to helping you get rid of certain sins, to bringing people into your lives who are true friends who stick closer than a brother.

[27 : 03] We see all of this actually restated exactly according to the terms I've described in 2 Corinthians 4. So just real quickly, look at this with me. 2 Corinthians 4, Paul is talking about his sufferings, and he says that it's okay.

The struggle, the back and forth, it's okay for two reasons. God is glorified, and I'm being sanctified. Look at 2 Corinthians 4, 7. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show the surpassing power belongs to God.

There's the glory of Jesus in the protecting, in the preserving. We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our body.

Reason number one, suffering is happening, why this back and forth thing is the thing that God has chosen for us to do. He gets glory by taking care of us, by showing us the surpassing power of God in our weakness.

And number two, he uses these hard things to make us better. Verse 16 through 17, Paul says, and we do not lose heart though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

[28 : 21] For this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us the eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. So there's the two things I just pointed out in John 17 in a completely different passage so you know it's true.

God has chosen to allow us to go through this tug of war kind of thing because it brings him great glory and it also brings us great good which is really the promise of Romans 8.28 which is probably the first promise anybody should memorize if they're a new Christian, Romans 8.28.

Now I want you to just understand how good we have it. And I'll use an illustration that came to mind from a recent experience. So when I was in the Philippines I saw a lot of souvenirs that I would like to take home to my wife.

Lots of stuff. But a lot of the things were too fragile for me to reliably take all the way back. Because as you know there's a certain moment at the airport where you say goodbye to your big bag and you surrender it to the hands of violent men to do whatever God had foreordained according to his definite will.

And so you know there's this moment where I was like well I can't protect like I would like to buy my wife a really nice vase from the Philippines for 50 cents and bring it back but I can't protect it.

[29 : 44] And so you know I can't reliably protect it. So like I can't I didn't bring her very many things at all. I brought her like a cloth bag and a t-shirt and you know lame things like that.

Some dried mangoes. All things that could survive. You know. But let's suppose that I was just so committed to getting her this vase which I don't think she really even wants but I was so committed to getting her this vase I did everything right.

Man I bubble wrapped this thing and I didn't even put it in my big bag. I kept it on me the whole time. And you know that's not super safe because I'm pretty clumsy but I manage. I go all the way through all these different airports 20 hours of flying and I deliver this vase to her well if I do everything perfectly right she will get the vase in the same condition that I bought it in.

Think about this friends. Jesus keeps us safe from all of these things including our own sin not to deliver us to the Father in the condition he bought us in but to deliver us in a condition that is far more sanctified and prepared for eternal glory than we were when he first bought us.

this is just a very unique situation we're dealing with here where his protection actually leads to our improvement. So these are some of the answers to a question that we're all going to ask some of

us this week because some of us this week have physical stuff going on and some of us this week have relational stuff going on and job stuff going on and you're like why is life not easier?

[31 : 37] Number one Jesus gets a whole lot of glory by protecting you and number two in his protective work he is actually purifying you and making you more like what you were always created to be so that he doesn't just deliver you to the Father in the condition he found you in somehow in the process of him guarding you through all the bumps and bruises and all the tribulations somehow as you're in his arms carried through that journey you actually become better you're not simply kept safe you're made sanctified there's nothing like this there's no one like this there's no other religion like this there's no other promise like this another way of thinking about this is imagine that in this tug of war

Jesus knows a couple things no one else knows number one he's definitely got this it's it's not even close he can give them lots of slack and recover all of it immediately there's no contest here between he the world the flesh and the devil but what if there's this other thing he knows that's like magic like Narnian magic and that is is that every time this flag goes like this like one or two threads in that flag turn to gold and he just knows that he has this plan for you and it's to go back and forth until you're sanctified to the degree that he has decided to sanctify you and then when he's done he will effortlessly pull you into his presence where there will be fullness of joy forevermore that's the plan that's the story that's what

Jesus is praying through in John 17 the book of Jude ends with a familiar benediction that celebrates this very thing now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy to the only God our Father through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory majesty dominion and authority before all time and now and forever amen this table is set up before you because Jesus knows that in the tug of war that is your life you will occasionally wonder am I really his and he has built this objective experience that you can taste and see to remind you that salvation belongs to the Lord and that he has given his body and his blood to not only purchase you but to purify you progressively as you walk with him through life so I would like you if you're a follower of Jesus to come and grab a cup and a piece of bread and come back to your seat and I'll lead us in partaking of these elements voy voy