

THE SAVIOUR PRAYING FOR US

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I pray for them. John 17:9

We are told in the text of something that Jesus does for us. Do I say rightly that he does for us? He said, "I pray for them," and he was speaking immediately of the little company of men who were right around him, the disciples. On the evening before the crucifixion, at the close of the farewell address, he said, "I pray for them," but you remember how a little later he said, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one." Through them and their word the circle would widen itself and continue to widen until it should embrace all that should ever become believers on him.

I invite you, dear Christian friends, to take this prayer in the 17th chapter of John, as giving you an idea of What sort of things the Lord Jesus Christ is asking for now in your behalf. Oh, that it may come home to us as downright reality that the Saviour who ever liveth, prays for you and me, knowing us better than we know our-selves, and that such things as these are the things for which he prays.

First then, notice this petition: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." What a common mistake it is among men to think that the only object Jesus Christ has with reference to the human race is to gather a few of them out of this world's destruction and carry them to the better world. But he said, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." He was going out of the world, and his heart longed after those who had been with him. They wondered why they could not go with him, and one even said, in self-confident fervor, "I am ready to go with thee to death." But he said, "I do not pray that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." Many good people think hard of themselves because they do not want to die. I have heard such persons say, "Ah me! I am so unwilling to die, I think anyone that loves God ought to be willing to die." Well, that is against nature. It is impossible; it is wrong. The Lord Jesus Christ proposes not merely to rescue some souls from this world's ruin, but to rescue them in this world and make them live in this world as they were meant to live, by the help of his grace. This world belongs to him, and what he proposes is to take some of those—all that will come to him—that are thus oppressed by sin, and to help them here to live a life such as they should live. The idea that a person who is in health and young, with opportunities of usefulness, should want to die, is absurd. Yet many people misunderstand the matter, and think hard of themselves that they love to live and shrink from the idea of dying. When people should live a long time in the nature of things, and find nothing to live for, some-thing is wrong about them. They may be maddened by dissatisfaction with life, or by intolerable distresses in life:

Mad from Life's history
Glad to Death's mystery
Swift to be hurled;
Anywhere, anywhere,
Out of the world.

I read that Elijah lay under a juniper tree in the desert and requested for himself that he might die; yet really I suppose there had been no time for many years when he was not

better fit to die than at that moment. In answer to his prayer, an angel came with food that he might eat and lie down and sleep again, and getting up might go work in God's service. Often when people are whining that they do not want to live, what they really need is food and sleep and exercise that they may be ready to serve God.

Now is that your desire? You feel many anxieties about life, you talk about the perils of life; is it your great struggle to escape evil, to live without sin? I do not know how it is with you, but I know how it is with Him. He ever liveth to intercede for you; and He prays that you may be kept from evil.

Then the second prayer: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." You observe he does not merely pray that they may be kept from evil, but that they may be made holy. Here is a common error among men about the service of Jesus Christ, the idea that it is merely a negative thing, that he proposes merely to keep them from doing evil, to keep them from doing harm. Some people think all there is in religion is to try to avoid doing harm, when Jesus goes on praying that they may be made holy. Piety is not a mere negative thing. The ten commandments, I know, are all in negative form, "thou shalt not." Even so, Christianity reveals that this is but one side, and that the other side, the nobler and more glorious side of piety, is that we must not merely try to keep from doing wrong, but try to do right. Jesus prays not simply that they may be kept from evil but that they may be made holy. My Christian hearers, I should be reluctant to ask any of you whether you think that you are holy, because those whom God would regard as holiest would be most pained to have such a question asked them. So I ask you the question, "Do you want to be holy?" and that question you should face. O men and women, you should desire to be holy! Anyhow, Jesus wishes that for you, and he prays, "Make them holy-make them holy through thy truth: thy word is truth."

It is truth that makes men holy. Earth's unholiness began with a lie that man believed and so went headlong to ruin. Truth is the lifeblood of piety. Truth is the medicine for the soul's disease. Nobody is ever made holy except through truth. Blessed be God, it often works its healing work though sadly mingled with error. The truth though it be adulterated with error, may yet through God's blessing work its healing, saving, sanctifying work. But it is only the truth that does the work. "Make them holy through thy truth." Pilate asked the question, "What is truth?" He asked the question the next morning, and here was the answer the night before, "Thy word is truth." We know that word, and we may use it as the great means *of* becoming holy.

Here, my brethren, I wish to offer you a practical counsel. I offer it as the result of a good deal of observation among Christian people, and of my own efforts amid a thousand infirmities and shortcomings, to lead a better life. My counsel is this, regard the Bible more than you have been accustomed to do, as that which we are to use as the means of becoming holy. Regard the Bible as the great means of making you better, of making you good. Use the Bible for that purpose. I know how it is, and you will pardon me for telling you. Many times you do not love to read your Bible. The truth is, you take up your newspaper a second time and go on looking for something else in it when the Bible is lying neglected by your side. Then when you do take the Bible, you feel that it is rather dull reading. Now my counsel is, learn to regard the Bible more as the means of making you better, of making you holy. When you read it in private or hear it read in public, educate yourselves to regard it as the great means of making you better, of strengthening you, of correcting your faults, of helping you to know your duty and helping you to do your duty. Fill your heart and mind full of the teachings of God's Word, hoping it will make you better, and this course will interest you in the Bible. You will take more interest in hearing the

preacher read it from the pulpit and explain and impress upon you its teachings, if you listen with the idea, "How I hope this will help me!" So in private read the Bible with the thought, "How I pray that this may do me good." Please remember this suggestion and act upon it!

Now let us consider the third petition: "That they all may be one"- That they all may be one." Ah; I see Jesus Christ standing in that night hour with his little company of eleven. I see him sending his thoughts down the coming years to dwell upon those who through these should believe on him, and his heart went out toward them, praying "that they all may be one." I see Jesus Christ bending now from the mediator's throne with endless solicitude for every human heart that looks lovingly up to him, and knowing them all in all, the sheep of his flock on earth, and praying still "that they all may be one."

Now, my brethren, you expect me to turn round and say to you, it is not so; you expect me to contrast with this prayer the sad divisions of the Christian world. But I shall do no such thing. It is so; the prayer is answered. You say, "Very imperfectly answered"? Certainly; and so is that other prayer, "Sanctify them, make them holy," that is very imperfectly answered, and yet you would not deny that it is answered. You may deem it strange that Jesus prayed that his people might be holy, and they are so unholy, yet you do not say his prayer is not answered. In like manner or to this other prayer, Christ's true people are one, I rejoice in it and thank God. When my heart is sad at the outward divisions of the Christian world and sadder in contemplating the bitterness that so often attends these divisions, then I turn for consolation to the thought that all that truly trust in Jesus Christ, that all who love Jesus Christ in sincerity, are one. They are more one than they know, and in proportion as they are united to the Redeemer, they are united with each other. I have seen differences in families, and yet I knew they were one notwithstanding this temporary unkindness and alienation. So among Christ's children, all that are truly his, are one.

Moreover, this prayer is to be more fully answered only in the same way that the previous prayer was to be fulfilled. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth," Yes, and "that they all may be one, ' through thy truth. The more gospel truth we know, and believe, and love, and live by, the more we shall be one. My friends, it seems to me that here is one of the great problems of the day in which you and I are called to live, to know how to cling to gospel truth in a spirit of broad kindness toward those who differ from us as to what is gospel truth. Many people are so possessed with the idea that every-thing must be given up to the outward union of Christians that they shrink from maintaining their views as to what is gospel truth, from the notion that this would interfere with Christian union. Some have so liberalized the Christian faith that they say, "Do not blame a man for his belief; it does not make much difference what a man believes." That is, there is no assured truth; one thing is as true as another.

On the other hand, there are people who set their heads upon certain views of truth-I did not say their hearts-until there is not any-thing in the whole horizon of their view but those particular tenets which distinguish them from their fellow Christians. Now it is a fact that men are made better only by truth, and that Christians will be made more thoroughly one only through truth, and it is folly to sacrifice truth for the sake of union-outward union. The practical problem we have to solve is, how to maintain supreme and sovereign devotion to God's truth, and yet deal in all loving-kindness, and generous affection, and hearty co-operation, with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. You say it is hard to do both of these things! Of course, it is hard to do anything well, always hard to do right and to do good, with this poor human nature of ours.

I mention one more petition. Recall those we have had. "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth. That they all may be one." And now finally, "Father, I *will* that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me." They had beheld his humiliation, those who accompanied him, and he longed that they might be with him to behold his glory. He offers the same prayer for all that should believe on him through their word.

There are two reasons why Jesus Christ made this petition. He asked it partly for his own sake. Did you never imagine that he was sad at leaving his disciples? You know that they were sad, but was not he? Did you never suppose that he longs to have those who love him more immediately with him? He said to his disciples, Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God and believe in me, and it will all be well. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go I will come again, and receive you unto myself. As a father taking leave of his family in going to a foreign country might say, "Now it is very sad that we are to be parted, but I am going to get a home for you, and when I get a home I will come back to you and take you there with me." He says it not only to comfort them, but more than they know perhaps, he says it to comfort his own heart also. And so Jesus said, "That they may be with me where I am." He wants to have his people with him.

But the other reason is more obvious to us; he made the prayer for their sake. He makes the prayer for our sake, "I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." To be with him is to be delivered from all the infirmities, and imperfections, and conflicts of this earthly life. I do not suppose we could bear all this if it were not for the fact that it is to end-and to end in victory. I suppose we should give over the struggling effort to do right and to do good in this world were it not for the assurance that we shall at last be conquerors and more than conquerors through him that loved us. To be with him will be to be with all who have loved us and who have gone before us to him. To be with him is to be free from all sin, and safe. Safe! O my soul, safe from all temptation to sin. To be with him is to behold his glory.

So the Saviour prays for us, and how grateful we are. Let us strive to fulfill his petitions that one day we may be with him.