

# † The Heart of Christ – the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

“...having loved His own who were in the world, He love them to the end”(John 13:1.)

## **The Praying Savior – John 17**

### **The Lessons from Jesus’ Prayer – John 17:1-26**

#### **Seven Characteristics of the Church: Mission (John 17:17-19)**

**17 Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. 18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.**

I suppose it goes without saying that we live in interesting times. Never before in history has there been a generation inundated with so many “things” along with so many “much” to do. There is always something to do, whether for business or for pleasure; whether for necessity or recreation. And I suppose that is why we older folks can get a little perturbed when we hear out of the mouths of the younger folks things like, “I’m bored. I’ve got nothing to do.” For immediately our minds fill with the countless chores or even of avenues of entertainment that could keep such souls busy.

The truth of the matter is this – there is always something to do. And most parents are adept at finding things for their bored little ones to do; so much so that some younger ones can learn very quickly not to ask say things like “I’m bored.” Of course what needs to be done may not always be something we like to do or even something we feel like doing, but there is always something to do. And in a similar fashion, those who are believers in Jesus Christ also always have something to do. As one preacher has put it, “the work of grace in our hearts never produces thumb-twiddling in our actions.” To follow Jesus is always to be doing something, prayerfully something we like to do and feel like doing. According to the passage of study this morning, *those who have been born again are sent into the world by the Lord of life to give the message of life to those who are spiritually dead.* How’s that for something to do? Beloved, that is a mission and it is the mission that that the Lord Jesus has given to us until He returns.

But what happens when we hear the words “mission” or “evangelism”? In part we might start thinking of missionaries and evangelists; those professional sorts who have a special call of God on their lives to do whatever it is that missionaries and evangelists do. And what is it that they do? Oh yes, they share the gospel of Jesus Christ; they tell others about God, about Jesus, about man’s rebellious nature against God, about sin, about death, about life and about salvation. But that isn’t a professional’s job. Rather it is the job of every Christian. It is the privilege of every believer. It is the work to which everyone in this room who professes to know Jesus Christ is to be actively engaged. It is not the work of a select few.

Let me remind you that beginning in John 17:13 and running through the end of the chapter, we are noticing and studying seven markers or characteristics that Jesus prays for His people; that Jesus prays for His church. Thus far we have seen Jesus praying that joy, holiness and truth all be evident in His people. And now, in addition to these we have the added marker of “mission”; that the people of Jesus be those who have a definite and demonstrable mission in this world, that mission including being sent out by Jesus to carry on His work. Notice that in verse 19 no believer is excluded.

If all believers are to experience the joy of Jesus; if all disciples of Christ are to be holy, that is set apart for God’s special use; and if all the followers of the Lord are to submit to and be

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guided by God’s truth as found in His Word; then it stands to reason that all true Christians are also to be characterized or known as those sent out into the world on the mission of proclaiming the gospel in both word and by life. Beloved, the mark of the redeemed according to John 17:18 is that they are on a mission to make Jesus Christ and His salvation known.

## **What is “mission”?**

Now, I keep using this word “mission” and I think it would do us well if I clarify what I mean. By “mission” I am speaking of a goal or objective that has been given by a superior. Just as the General gives his men a task to accomplish, some enemy stronghold to secure or destroy and the men follow that order in obedience to the General; so we who are in Christ have been given a task that we are to follow in obedience. Let me define “mission” this way – a mission is *“a person or group that is given a specific goal or objective which they dedicate themselves to carry out in order to honor the desires of the one who sent them.”*

In the New Testament we have what we call the Great Commission – which is a “co” – a cooperative effort whereby the followers of Jesus, by means of the grace of God, the teachings of Jesus and the power of the Spirit, make other followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus says in Matthew 28:19 – **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...”** This sounds like a sending to me, just like Jesus saying, **“As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.”** Beloved, we have been commissioned to a mission. This is not an optional activity for the believer in Jesus, it is to be our duty and it is our privilege. Remember, if the work of grace has found its way into your heart then know as well that it does not produce thumb-twiddling in our spiritual life. We should never saw, whether in word or by our actions, that we are bored in the Christian life. We’ve been brought from death to life...how can such a thing be hidden? How can we be silent about such a truth that is available to all who hear and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ?

This morning then, it is my intention to show you how the marker of mission is to be a characteristic of the church and therefore indeed a reality in each of our lives. We will be using the same text as we did last week, John 17:17-19 as the ideas of sanctification; that is being separated for God’s use, truth; that is God’s Word; and mission are all connected. To see this idea of mission as a mark of the church, let me ask you with three key questions:

1. Are we prepared for the mission?
2. What is the purpose of the mission?
3. Who is the prototype for the mission?

## **I. Are we prepared for the mission? (John 17:17)**

*Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.*

It is easy to see the idea of being set apart for God’s special use and purpose by means of His Word from verse 17. This is what we looked at last week. But just what is the connection between the idea of being sanctified and the idea of mission in verse 18? I find it amazing that in much of the teaching on evangelism and mission today we do not also find what Jesus stresses in these two verses. The only way to effectively accomplish the mission of Christ is to become more and more like Christ in word and deed. Mission and sanctification are intricately connected

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in these verses. What is necessary for us to carry out the mission of Christ is that we must be set apart by the truth in order to properly proclaim the truth.

Let us remember that at the conversion of a sinner a person is justified, made right before God by the blood of Christ. That person is declared to be just as righteous and holy as Jesus has always been; again, not because of what we have done, but because of what Jesus has done for us. Being declared right in the sight of God does not mean that everything we do from that time forward will be right. Justification is our position, it is our standing – we are right before God because we believe in the work of Christ for us. In addition then to our justification, the sinner also begins the processes called sanctification, that process by which he can daily behold more and more of the glory and holiness of God, the sinfulness of his own life, the merits of Christ for the repentant, the gift of regeneration whereby his sinful rebellious heart is made holy and obedient to the commands of Christ. Sanctification is to be our experience as we look and act more and more like Christ.

What does this have to do with carrying out the mission of Christ? Beloved, justification gives us the *right* to carry out the mission of proclaiming salvation in Christ; but sanctification, this process that Jesus speaks of here in verse 17, gives us the *light* and the *power* to proclaim Christ. Think of it this way. I hold the title or position of “Pastor” or “Preacher”. I have been given the right to preach, first by God and then by this congregation. This is my standing. I’ve been justified as a preacher. But that right doesn’t instantaneously produce sermons. Weekly I must prayerfully labor with the text to understand its meaning and applications to our lives. This is a process, like sanctification. Justification makes views me as a child of God whereas sanctification allows me to act like a child of God. As children of God, we have been given all the resources, everything necessary to proclaim the gospel. We have the truth of God’s Word and changed lives; now we use these to proclaim the truth before the world. This is our mission.

And so, let me ask you...are you prepared for the mission of proclaiming Christ? Have you been justified by your faith that Jesus died for your sins and by His death and resurrection you may have true life in God? And then, even more practically speaking, are you being sanctified, changed more and more into the image of Jesus Christ, wanting to say the things He said and do the things He did? Jesus prays in verse 17, **“Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”** What Jesus is praying for is that His people would be prepared to be sent into the world. And just how are they prepared? By being set apart by the truth of God’s Word. Again we learn that to be set apart for God’s special purpose of proclaiming His Son in both word and deed, we need to be a people of the Word, hearing, studying, meditating on, embracing and applying its principles to our lives. To be prepared is to be regularly in the word; prayerfully learning its truths and obediently living out those truths. This is your mission – to live out the truths of Christ before the world.

How does the word prepare us? Beloved, the Word gets our focus off our selves. Following the Word keeps us from trying to reach people with all sorts of techniques, schemes and other forms of manipulations that don’t really bring about true spiritual change. Today, too many are concerned with numbers or what man can accomplish than laboring to see people made complete in Christ. I fear that we see many religious decisions, but ultimately such decisions are not resulting in true inward change of life and conduct. And by a change of life of conduct I don’t mean simply that a person vows to give up smoking or not to lie or to be a better spouse. Beloved, the transformed life that comes from true sanctification is an ever-increasing desire to be a testimony, a portrait of the life and conduct of Jesus Christ. And so, if you are not looking and acting more and more like Jesus, you have no testimony and you are not prepared

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for the mission that Christ has for His people. Without the ongoing process of sanctification by means of the Word of God teaching you, reproving you, correcting you and training you in righteousness, there is no obedience to the mission of Christ.

I am preaching to myself more than to anyone else; but beloved, a spiritually stagnant Christian, one who is not continually and increasingly coming to the Word to be changed, such a person is a lifeless and mission-less Christian. Before your hobbies, before your entertainment, before your DVD's and MP3's are you preparing yourself by prayerfully being a student of the Word? A lifeless and mission-less Christian is a contradiction. Such a person is like a stagnant pond that is increasing in scum and stench. The Word of God is the fresh and flowing water of life that brings life to your soul as well as grace by which those who see your Spirit-filled life may see the soul refreshing power of God.

May I suggest to you then that as your life reflects more and more of the gospel message and your head is more and more full of the truths of the gospel; then you will be prepared for mission and you will be emboldened for this work of mission. Jesus is not looking for glamorous or outlandish lives, just humble and willing lives that desire to carry out the mission of Christ. Are you prepared for the mission?

## II. What are the purposes of the mission? (John 17:18)

*As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.*

After we prepare ourselves for the mission by being in and changed by the Word of God, we might then ask ourselves, “What is the purpose of the mission?” What is it that we are to accomplish? What are the goals and objectives of this mission? I would offer you three such purposes from our text:

### 1. To demonstrate our obedience

The first purpose of the mission as presented by Jesus is simply this; to demonstrate our obedience. How do we see this in the text? Notice that Jesus says in effect, “Father, just as I demonstrated obedience to You and came to the world to proclaim Your salvation, so I now also have sent them into the world, that they might demonstrate their obedience to Me by proclaiming Your salvation.”

And, as we already noted, there is no Christian that is excused from this activity. To be a Christian is to be sent out into the world. To be a Christian is to obey and keep the mission. The believer walking with Jesus not only wants the joy of Jesus, the holiness of Jesus and the truth of Jesus, but he will also desire to carry on the mission of Jesus; of proclaiming His gospel, the good news of salvation.

But here is where our flesh so quickly can get in the way. In our minds flood all sorts of comebacks and excuses. We might say, “I don't know enough to talk to others about Jesus.” Or, “I'm a shy person around others.” Or, “I don't have the gift of evangelism.” Or, “My season of life prevents me from carrying on the mission.” Look, my friends, I am the first to realize that carrying on the mission of Christ will take on various forms. There will be some times in your life that you have more opportunities than at other times. But do not allow your heart for one minute to use anything to excuse yourself from the mission unless you are also willing to part with the joy, the holiness and truth that Jesus also prays would be yours. ‘

So, how should we respond to our reasons to excuse ourselves from the mission of being sent out? I take you back to verse 17. Jesus prays that you would be set apart for God's special purpose by means of your being changed by the truth of God's Word. God loosens our

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stammering tongues as we are sanctified by the Word. God impressed upon us the call and privilege of telling others about the gospel as we are sanctified by the Word. And let me make this bold assertion. I can say with all confidence to you; the Lord does not save any that He does not also send; and all that He sends are marked by an ongoing work of sanctification by which He also enables and equips their lives with the testimony of His grace. I ask you, is anything too difficult for our God? May we never think that the God who created the world and parted the Red Sea and delivered Daniel from the mouths of the lions and who raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead is somehow incapable of setting us apart to be effective communicators of His life transforming power. Do you believe that the Captain of our souls will not also provide us everything needful for the battle? Let us then in obedience be faithful soldiers, sent out into the world to carry on the mission of Jesus.

## 2. To demonstrate the world's need

A second purpose for being sent out is to demonstrate to the world its great need. All people have a problem, a sin problem. All have sinned and the wages of sin is death. Notice in verse 18 that Jesus says, “into the world” two times. I see this emphasis of Jesus reminding us that the mission is to go to every corner of the world; to every tribe, tongue, people and nation. And so, we are to proclaim the gospel wherever we find ourselves. Some take the gospel across the sea, but each of us is sent into the circles you find yourself. Do not think you have no one to proclaim the gospel too. Wherever you find yourself, that is where God wants you to tell the world about the gospel. Speak to your neighbors, to your coworkers, to your schoolmates, to your sports team, in your email, on Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr and any other social network you find yourself on. Jesus sent you into the world to tell them that there is a Redeemer who will save them from their condition of sin and alienation from God.

The apostle Paul picks up this very idea in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. Turn there and let us see this purpose of communicating to the world its need of the salvation of God as found in Jesus alone.

*18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

What is the good news to be communicated to world? The good news is that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (making peace with enemies by) not counting their trespasses against them...” And how is it that God is able to not count the trespasses against those who come to Him? Because of what verse 21 tells us, “[God] made [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in [Jesus].” The need of the world is to hear of both their sickness and the remedy; of their sinfulness and of redemption from sin; of their self-alienation from God and yet of God's gracious hospitality. This is what the world needs to hear.

## 3. To demonstrate God's design

And this then bring us to the third purpose of our being sent out into the world, namely to demonstrate God's design. Still looking at 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 19, we read there “*and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*” Of all the ways God could have chosen to

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spread the news of His gospel abroad, He chose to use frail, shy, sometime belligerent and willful creatures like you and me. Have you ever wondered why? It is by God's design. God wants the message of reconciliation, of being made one with God by the blood of Jesus Christ, to be proclaimed by the ones He sent into the world. And who are those who are sent? Those who are sent are those who have experienced the work of reconciliation, who have heard the truth of God's word and have been transformed. And every believer needs to realize that because he or she has experienced salvation, he or she becomes a better messenger than any of the angelic host, because they have not been reconciled or redeemed. You have a story to tell that no angel in heaven can tell. That beloved, is amazing. Oh that we might know and tell the story of our salvation over and over again.

To say all this again, the world needs to hear about salvation, so we proclaim reconciliation and then God performs reconciliation for all who believe that Jesus is Lord and Savior. Let us never forget that God has chosen us for His own glory and purposes to carry out the mission of proclaiming the most important message for every human to hear. That is His design!

### III. Who is the prototype for the mission? (John 17:18-19)

*As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.*

This brings us then to our last question. We have already asked, “Are we prepared for the mission?” The answer ought to be, “Yes, as I read and study God's Word and am increasingly ready for the mission.” We have also asked and answered the question, “What are the purposes of the mission?” The purposes are to demonstrate our obedience to Jesus who sent us, to demonstrate to the world its need of Jesus and to demonstrate God's design in using us to proclaim the reconciliation He performs. Finally then, let us ask, “Who is the prototype for the mission?” In other words, who is our example? Who is our model for the mission? That's an easy answer, is it not? Our prototype, our example is Jesus.

Notice how Jesus demonstrates Himself to be this prototype in verse 18. He uses two little, but significant words saying, “**As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.**” To say it another way, “Just like You sent Me into the Word, in the same way, or in like manner, I also have sent them into the world to imitate Me.”

Let me close by showing you at least two ways in which we follow the example of Jesus Christ as those sent into the world.

#### 1. We are sent as Ambassadors

We have already seen this idea in 2 Corinthians 5:20 where we are called ambassadors, but here we note specifically Jesus meaning that just as He was sent into the world to represent the Father and the Godhead; and to make known the truth of God and now, following His example, just as He was sent into the world to represent God, we have been sent into the world to carry on His mission, of making God and His salvation known in the world.

And this is where our being sanctified by the truth is so important because to be sanctified is to become more and more like Jesus. It should seem strange to us to claim to be an ambassador for Christ if we more resemble the world than Christ, should it not? So then, we are sent to represent Jesus even as Jesus represented God.

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## 2. We are sent with Authority

Not only are we sent out as ambassadors for Christ, but we are also sent with the authority of Christ. When Jesus came to the earth, He came with all the authority of heaven. In Matthew 28:18-20, the Great Commission, we see Jesus declaring that He has all authority. And it is with that authority that we are being sent out. Jesus said it this way in Matthew 28:18-19, **“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...”** I love this as Jesus says in effect, “Because I have all authority over heaven and earth, everything answers to Me, everything is subject to Me, by this authority given to Me, I now send you out and commission you with the mission of making learners of Me.”

Charles Spurgeon put it well saying, “Be sure that, when Jesus sends you, you are invested with authority, and they that despise you will do it at their peril...God is with you, be not afraid; your Lord will not let your words fall to the ground.” Wow! Oh to always have such awareness, that God is with me and He will not let His mission fail. Our mission is not to save anyone, but to proclaim to everyone that salvation is found in Jesus alone. We need not be fearful of those who scoff and reject, for they are not scoffing and rejecting us, but the Almighty God. And what of those whose hearts are pricked by the Spirit and brought to salvation by means of the proclamation we make. Could there be anything sweeter? Could there be anything more glorious than to be the instrument through whom God touched the heart of another and opened his eyes to behold the beauty of Jesus as Lord and Savior. Beloved, each believer has the authority of heaven to make that proclamation. Let us proclaim it.

But as we began, let us remember that none of this is possible, that none of this is true effectual apart from lives that are daily being conformed to the image of Christ by means of the Word of God. Effective evangelism is always to be built upon increasing knowledge and practice of God’s Word. Let put it another way, the more you are prayerfully and meaningfully in God’s Word the more you will tell others of God’s Word. It really is as simple as that. So as we close, let me ask you a few questions by way of application.

1. Are you currently engaged in a prayerful and meaningful reading and meditating of God’s Word? Do you believe God is satisfied with the time you spend with Him in His Word?
2. Assuming that even the best of the studiers desire deeper, more meaningful times in the Word of God, what are those things that hinder you from that deeper more meaningful time with God? Identify them specifically and start praying that God would help you remove them?
3. Beside God, to whom are you making yourself accountable to read and mediate on God’s Word?
4. The best testimony of being in the Word is living a life that is demonstrably being changed by the Word. What areas are you seeing the Word of God have an effect in your life? Pray that these might increase, or that God would enable you to see such changes taking place in your life.

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5. Who are the people you have been “sent into the world” for? How are you being a faithful ambassador for Christ to these people?
6. Remember that Jesus has by His authority sent you out into the world with His authority, are there areas in which you feel as though you were lacking something in order to tell others about Christ? Since all believers truly lack nothing necessary, take these to the Lord as ask for them to be removed and replaced with a true sense of mission. Remember that you cannot replace any feelings of inadequacy without being in the Word of God.
7. How might you be an encouragement to others in this congregation concerning this mission – to proclaim Christ and His salvation? Pray about such things and do them?

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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**The Praying Savior – Lessons from Jesus’ Prayer: Seven Characteristics of the Church According to Jesus: Mission (John 17:17-19)**  
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